



ME AND MY CELL PHONE

and Other Essays on Technology
in Everyday Life

CRYSTAL POWELL

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Me and My Cell Phone

And Other Essays On Technology In
Everyday Life

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To my family, friends and supervisor for
encouraging me to write

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Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are fascinating devices. They have been systematically introduced to the world and have increasingly (and quite rapidly) become a normal part of everyday life for many people. The cell phone¹, in particular, has become a major attribute to the human existence and indeed, those who do not own a cell phone can find themselves relegated to an uncomfortable, almost inexcusable, minority. The Japanese refer to cell phones as “*keitai*: something you carry with you”. More than a technological device that offers the freedom of mobility, *keitai* represents a “snug and intimate techno-social tethering, a personal device supporting communications that are constant, lightweight, and mundane in everyday life” (Ito *et al* 2005: 1, 20). On the surface, *keitai* would seem to be a generally appropriate term for the cell phone as its rapid integration into the daily lives of many could indicate such a cozy and comfortable tethering, perhaps taken for granted. However, a deeper look into these techno-social relationships could reveal a tethering of a slightly different nature; one of tension and insecurity, of frustration and forced contentment. Studies have shown that people willingly use cell phones because of their most assumed benefits including: constancy of communication, mobility, individual control and privacy (Horst & Miller 2006: 79), the compression of distance, agency stimulation and the upgrading of prestige and social status (de Bruijn *et al* 2009). Whether these assumed benefits prove accurate all, most, some or none of the time can influence the nature of the unavoidable techno-social tethering that one is (subconsciously) bound to develop with their technological devices.

¹ I use the term cell phone here as I refer to the device in my casual referencing. Throughout the book, however, the terms cell phone and mobile phone are used interchangeably in accordance with the authors that I reference.

Despite becoming an active cell phone user relatively late compared to most people that I know, the cell phone, in general, had become so mundane in and around my life. Even before I purchased my own cell phone, almost everyone I knew had one and it was a common feature among the people that I saw daily. I took its existence for granted and never questioned its impact even in my own life. I remember when cell phones first became popular and how exciting it was for people to show them off. It was not long before they became routine and I became somewhat desensitized to them thereafter until I purchased my own cell phone thus rekindling my awareness of them. I have owned a cell phone (on and off) for about four years now. I recently had the opportunity to write a reflexive essay detailing my own relationship and experiences with my cell phone – an ICT that I will focus on during my Doctoral research at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in Cape Town, South Africa. Acknowledging that quality research depends on quality questions, writing this essay was a welcomed challenge of answering a researcher’s question on often taken for granted everyday relations. Thus emerged *Me and My Cell Phone*. I begin my essay with a glimpse of my life before I purchased a cell phone and then I share my experiences with the device up to the present. Before writing this essay I had not really known my own ambivalences around owning a cell phone and the turmoil that had been brewing in my own techno-social tethering which reflects itself in the way I currently use my cell phone. It became clear to me that I both cherished and despised my phone. On the one hand I was in love with my cell phone, cooing over its every feature and dazzled by its many functions (despite never maximizing its full capabilities). I was impressed by its ability to transform my seemingly un-cool and unimportant social standing to none other than cool (fancy) and important (at least in my eyes). Furthermore, I loved its hybridity. Lamoureaux (2011:40) writes that a cell phone “is both a tool for ‘keeping in touch’ and for artfully avoiding that social obligation”. This ambidextrous quality was, by far, my phones most coveted value. I was grateful for its ability to keep my family and friends close when necessary while at the same

time relieved and comforted by its ability to offer freedom from those same people; helping to deliver me to and from conversations and social obligations that I might otherwise have had to miss out on or commit to. I was grateful for its ability to both compress and maintain distance.

On the other hand my cell phone, I learned, was capable of an unhealthy dependency and emotional imprisonment. My cell phone had the potential to draw me in demanding complete (sometimes involuntary) emotional involvement towards its existence beyond its function as a communication device. I was, in a sense, trapped in the seemingly inevitable relationship that is forged between person and object if one is not careful. A relationship built on trust in the performance and abilities of the cell phone and one's complete reliance on it as (one of) their primary source(s) of communication and its ability to be a trustworthy companion. While a meaningful relationship with a cell phone might be necessary for a smooth integration into one's life, too many uncertainties attributed to the cell phone can result in a sudden break-up between the two resulting in certain emotions rarely acknowledged, talked about or admitted by the person. I speak of two extremes of the techno-social relationship between me and my cell phone: I loved it and hated it. However, to present the relationship between myself and my cell phone as solely binary, fluctuating between the two extremes would be misleading. Techno-social relationships, as are any relationships, are never always harmonious, nor are they always in conflict. Techno-social relationships are not black and white and I had the opportunity to grapple with my own gray matter in between the two extremes, acknowledging the times when our relationship was indifferent and I did not love it or hate. I simply put up with it and relegated its existence to a (sometimes) necessary communication device and nothing more.

Writing *Me and My Cell Phone* helped me to confront my own ambiguities towards owning a cell phone and the pleasures and challenges of using the device to ensure communication with others on my own terms. Excitement around new technologies like the cell

phone has resulted in a tendency for people to assume a position of technological determinism regarding relationships between technology and society. Had I not acknowledged my own intimate history with my cell phone, I too may have subconsciously sided with this notion, asking limited and limiting questions around technosocial relationships. I became keenly aware of my cell phone in relation to myself, particularly as I interchange between being a cell phone owner and active cell phone user when I am away at school and being a cell phoneless individual when I am home. I grew more and more curious about ICTs in general; how people used them and what people were saying about them.

My curiosity was not limited to cell phones per se but the Internet and social media as well, particularly social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In my quest to learn more about ICTs, I read a series of articles, scholarly books and novels. This book is thus a culmination of my thoughts and reactions to and interpretations of what I have read and the stories (public and private) that I have heard about ICTs. I start with my own reflexive essay *Me and My Cell Phone*, as chapter 2, inviting the reader to share my experiences of owning a cell phone. My experiences, though perhaps not particularly unique, I hope, will be of interest not only as far as they could reveal similarities with the reader's own relationship with their cell phone (and other technologies) but will be entertaining and entice the reader to read further. Furthermore, I hope *Me and My Cell Phone* will help the reader to better understand my interpretations of ICTs throughout the book.

The curiosity enkindled by my *Me and My Cell Phone* essay sent me foraging for what others have had to say. Chapter 3 is a review of the first book I stumbled on: de Bruijn *et al's* (2009) *Mobile Phones: The New Talking Drums of Everyday Africa*, a book that I read to learn more about cell phones in an African context. The book was both beneficial for my own knowledge and the research that I was soon to embark on for my Doctoral research. With respect and appreciation for the information provided in the book, my critical review challenges the content only in relation to the title as the contents did

not convince me that mobile phones were indeed the new talking drums of everyday Africa. I question the ability of the contents to validate such a title, implicitly suggesting that perhaps the book should be titled differently. The introduction of the book included an excerpt from Francis Nyamnjoh's (2009) novel, *Married But Available* depicting a young researcher's plight to retrieve her cell phone that she accidentally left in a taxi. I found the excerpt intriguing and again it ignited my curiosity around cell phones and how people responded to them. I wondered how much more of his novel focused on cell phones and what sort of things it said about them, if any. Upon learning that Nyamnjoh's novels are in fact merges of ethnography and fiction; avenues in which he shares his ethnographic fieldwork in a more reader friendly manner (Nyamnjoh 2011), I was eager to read some of his other novels to learn what themes they reflected, and possibly more about ICTs and their appropriations in different contexts. Chapters 4, 5 & 6 are essays that I wrote about three of his novels, identifying the various ways that ICTs were featured in the stories and how the characters used them to their benefit and peril, thrills and tribulations.

From novels highlighting techno-social relationships, I began to think more about social media. During this time, news of the social media uprisings in Middle East and North Africa had already made headlines. Incorporating different books and articles that I have read about ICTs and social media, Chapter 7 is an essay that I wrote, reflecting on these uprisings; analyzing the use of social media in this way. I acknowledge the controversial views of calling such uprisings 'social media revolutions' and question, as do many journalists, whether these types of uprising are indeed more beneficial than past methods of uprisings. I look at the differences between the concept of social media and the accuracy or effectiveness of social media tools in the pursuit of meaningful and successful social uprisings. I also introduce the relationships that people have with their technologies as factors into the willingness for participation in uprisings of this manner. Reading about social networks consequently led me to material culture anthropologist Daniel Miller, an authority

in scholarly writings on people and social networking, and often a pioneer at that. I felt it appropriate to read and review three of his books on ICTs and social networking which make up chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 8 is a dual review of Miller and Slater's (2000) *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* and Horst and Miller's (2006) *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication*. Here, I discuss the authors' findings on the use of the Internet and cell phones in a Trinidadian and Jamaican context respectively. Pertinent in these ethnographies is the focus on technology within the particular cultural practices and social meanings of Trinidad and Jamaica. While addressing these particular techno-social relationships the authors present both the technologies and their users as active agents in a social world and I reflect on the idea that ICTs have agency. In chapter 9, I review Miller's (2011) *Tales from Facebook*. As someone who does not have a Facebook account of my own, I read Miller's book with a genuine curiosity around what people (in this case, Trinidadians) were saying about Facebook and how it affected them. I compare his research to what I have learned about Facebook within my own circle of friends who are Facebook members. In relation to other readings that I have done on ICTs and Facebook, I attempt to understand his 'theory' of Facebook. Additionally, I write about his revelations of Facebook usage in Trinidad – as he suggests that "...ideas about what one can do with Facebook may arise first in a place such as Trinidad" (p. xiv) – in relation to my own limited knowledge and thoughts around the social network giant.

As a researcher currently conducting my own fieldwork, the books that I have read and reviewed have contributed to my personal knowledge around ICTs and have helped broaden my ideas and approaches to the (potential) use(s) of ICTs while in the field. Two of Francis Nyamnjoh's novels, *The Travail of Dieudonne* (2008) and *Married But Available* (2009) that I read and reviewed (see chapters 6 and 4 respectively) are inspired by his knowledge of Cameroon and West Africa. The other *Intimate Strangers* (2010) is inspired mostly by research done in Botswana (see chapter 5). As I am conducting research in Cape Town, I was interested in inspiration closer to

home. Drawing lessons on those who have gone before me, I familiarized myself with Fiona Ross's (2009) *Raw Life, New Hope: Decency, housing and everyday life in a post-apartheid community* an outstanding ethnography based on research conducted in the Western Cape, South Africa. Her work, like mine deals with a population of people who are socially, politically and economically marginalized in Cape Town, South Africa. In chapter 10, I refer to her book, particularly focusing on the sorts of things that appealed to Ross while conducting her research and why. I write about my work while dwelling on certain aspects of Ross's book that struck particular interests to me and my own research such as sense-scapes (Ch. 3 pp. 54-75), social networking as strategies for getting by (Ch. 5 particularly pp. 112-127) and communication and speech communities (Ch. 6 pp. 138-167). I use her book to make sense of and balance emerging ideas of my own.

Ross's book, similar to Nyamnjoh's novels, has been influential to the ways in which I can eventually write about and share my ethnographic fieldwork publicly after the more formal and academic restrictions of my forthcoming dissertation (anticipated submission: 2014). My own research on ICTs and the reconfiguration of marginality is a study of migration and belonging focusing on Langa Township located in Cape Town, South Africa. Langa Township is a settlement that owes its initial existence to internal migration but has come to include both internal and external migrants from within South Africa and around the African continent resulting in increased issues around citizenship and belonging. In a socially marginalized population such as the residents of Langa Township, I am looking at new ICTs and the various innovations employed by such a population from these technologies, particularly the cell phone. Assuming that patterns of mobility and migration today are intertwined with the social appropriation of ICTs, my study seeks to address the extent and ways that ICTs: mitigate distance for mobile communities; lead to new socio-economic relations; redefine socio-political relations; relate to development of the marginal (mobile) populations in South Africa and how. My study stresses that new

technologies are best understood within an historical perspective. Langa Township is particularly suitable for such a study as communication technologies of the day must have played a significant role in the lives of migrants.

As I am still in the beginning stages of my fieldwork, I find it useful to occasionally write reflexive essays that stem from thoughts and experiences documented in my field note diary. These essays help identify themes that I can pursue as I move further along in my research. Chapter 11 is one such essay where I describe one aspect of my life since moving into Langa Township. I run for exercise several days week to keep fit. *Baby Steps into Langa Township: Running in Langa* is a reflexive essay about my experiences of running in Langa and how it compares to my experiences of running before moving into the Township. I attempt to understand myself and the activity of running in relation to Langa as a space and some of the residents. Cell phones feature very little in this essay and ICTs in general are non-existent but I chose to include this essay as it reveals a part of my life that was significantly changed when I moved to Langa Township. And while running in Langa is in no way related to my primary research goals and is not likely to have a prominent place in my eventual dissertation, an opportunity to reveal such experiences in an ethnographic novel may well be possible once I obtain my Doctorate. Important, in this essay, however, is the theme of privacy (and the lack of privacy) reminiscent of debates around ICTs and how they affect our sense of privacy, that I refer to which speaks to the mentality of (some) Langa residents as a possible reflection of the space(s) they live in. I felt that this reflexive essay in particular was also appropriate for showing the value that I place on privacy. I hope this sheds more light on my use of my cell phone to maintain my privacy as I find it easy to hide behind my cell phone (and on some occasions I hide behind my running as you will read) to escape from certain social obligations that sometimes threaten my private space.

Just as the book begins with a personal reflective essay, it ends on the same note with a personal reflection of part of my life while living in my field site. Though this book is academic in its genre, I use these

two reflexive essays to be more approachable to the reader and to attract readers less interested in academia. I willingly make myself vulnerable in attempt to be relatable to my readers. I hope the personal essays, and the book as a whole, will be both entertaining and informative. I ask the reader to indulge my curiosity around ICTs and join me in my quest to understand them – and their relation to myself and others – in a greater way.

Me and My Cell Phone

Before we met

I love the fact that I can hide behind my cell phone. That I can literally be holding the phone in my hands when a call is coming through and still avoid the call claiming that “I was away from my phone at the time” is bliss. Sure I carry it with me almost everywhere I go but you cannot know that. You might assume that I am always carrying it with me but that is your assumption. To assume that I have a cell phone at all, given the fascination with technological gadgets of our time, is not wrong here in Cape Town but it would be wrong if I were home in New York. At home I do not have a cell phone. Does that surprise you? People look at me like I have three heads when I confess that I do not have a cell phone. A question, or two or three may arise as to why not but after a moment, whether my answer(s) suffices or not, the shock is gone. Nobody cries. Life goes on. It just catches people off guard at first. To them it is impossible to function without a cell phone. I am strange. I am a rebel. I can live with that. Answering a few questions now and then is not so bad.

I am not annoyed by the questions. I am used to them. I do not need a cell phone. My excuse: at home anyway, I am not that important. I have a small circle of friends whom I can count on one hand. Given that we are all students and/or have full-time jobs we are busy during the week. Hanging out is a cherished but limited pastime which we usually coordinate by email. My life is routine. I am at one of three places (church, school or work) at any given time. If I am at none of those places I am home. If my friends and I manage a dinner outing one weekend at the end of the month then I would be there but of course they would know that. My family would too. Besides, I do not like being particularly available anyway at least not by phone. I hate talking on the phone. I never have much to say after the initial ‘hi’ and ‘how are you’. Even when there is something to

say, important or not, it just comes out better in person. That I cannot comfortably have personal conversations in any of the three places I mentioned is fine with me. My landline, you could say, is sort of my enemy. It forces me to talk when I prefer not to. When I am home I have to be available to talk particularly because save for email that is my only means of communication. I can choose not to pick up the house phone when it rings but what if someone else picks it up: “Hello... Yes she is, hold on... Crystal... the phone...” How can I avoid taking *that* call? Still, seeing as I only have a handful of friends I can ignore most of the phone calls that come to my house and that is also fine with me.

Meeting my baby

Moving to Cape Town was the biggest thing I had ever done in my life. For the next two years it was to be my home. I purchased my first cell phone when I came to Cape Town. I thought it was appropriate seeing as I was now far away from home where my whereabouts and schedules would not be so predictable. Hell, there was an eight hour time difference for one thing. I needed my family to be with me. Leaving home for the first time – and out of the country – they would need to know that I was ok. I would let them experience as much as I could vicariously through my cell phone. An awesome or shocking moment, a scary moment, an unusual meal... all of these experiences needed to be, for my sake, a text message or a phone call away from them.

Despite never having a cell phone before, it was surprising at how natural it seemed for me to want or need to use it this way. I needed to be able to text or call at will and that was never much of a luxury since I was dependent on public payphones outside or my landline when I was indoors. However, I was not oblivious to the benefits of a cell phone. All of my friends and most of my family members had one and I saw how useful they could be. My friends, as important as they were, could wait until I found an Internet café but my family needed to be there at my fingertips at least during my first

weeks. I chose to buy a phone. I had become, in a sense, like those people who felt one could not function without one. I was not looking for approval or a way to avoid be questioned. I needed to be able to contact my family at the spur of the moment. A landline (which I did not have in my flat) just would not do.

I admit I was excited about my phone but I did not make a huge production out of purchasing one. I think I only looked at two phones before choosing mine. I did not necessarily want a cheap phone but I was also not interested in getting a fancy phone. I knew I wanted a small one. It had to be small and black or mostly black. Those were my only requirements. With that in mind I purchased a cell phone. The initial purchase was not exciting. It was when I got home that the excitement started to kick in. I ended up buying an expensive and beautiful black and silver LG phone. It was a small narrow phone that fit comfortably in the palm of my hand. It was so sleek. It was brand new. It was a cell phone and it was mine. It had so many functions, never minding that I only texted and phoned my family. I did not even know all of its capabilities or how to use them. I did briefly go through the manual but all I really wanted to know was how to save numbers, how to send text messages and eventually how to take and send pictures (I never did figure out how to send pictures to another phone or email).

That the phone had so many extra functions was enough to make me feel not just important but cool. Maybe I had wanted a fancy phone after all. It made me cool and this was before I had even made any friends in Cape Town. Yes I was cool. Nobody was going to look at me like I had three heads with this baby. It was my baby. I found myself looking at it unnecessarily several times a day. I loved to hold it. It was so small and cute. Of course, holding it meant taking the time to wipe it down afterwards. I did not like to see my baby stained with fingerprints (weird I know). Yes, I would hold it, press buttons, sometimes check out the different games that I rarely played because they wasted so much battery power, and check my airtime which remained plenty since I had no friends. I would check my pocket several times throughout the day to ensure that it was still there

despite the fact that it was almost impossible for it to have fallen out. I was proud of my phone. I did not flash it around or show it off. I had, after all, no one to show it off too. It was more of a personal thing. This was something I had never had before. No one knew that but me. I had gone from one extreme to the next. At home I never cared about having a cell phone nor did I ever covet anyone else's. Now, it was what I thought about a lot of the time. To say most of the time would be extreme but I as you have read, it filled more of my thoughts than a little bit. We were an item my little phone and me. We were a team.

I had in a crazy way been promoted in the eyes of my family. I was all grown up living on my own in Cape Town and to top it off I had a cell phone. They had been trying to convince me to get a phone for so long and now I had one. To receive a text message or a cell phone-to-cell phone call from Crystal, the formerly infamous Powell without a cell phone, was exciting for them and it was exciting for me. I was one of them. I was cool like them. As much as I did not mind being un-cool at home it was nice to be cool here especially in the eyes of my family. I can only describe what I felt as being cool. I am not sure that having a phone was a primary qualification for being cool in their eyes but it definitely promoted me to something. For my friends "it was about time" that I had gotten one even though I still only contacted them through email. By owning a cell phone I had gotten approval from my friends and family. Best of all, I was able to do what I wanted. I could communicate with my family at will which really came in handy when I was homesick.

Our first friend

It took me a few weeks to settle in and find my way in Cape Town. I had begun attending classes but kept mostly to myself. My cell phone, for the first couple of weeks, was my only companion. Then it happened: I made a friend. We exchanged numbers and there I had it. She was the first non-family members' number that I saved in my phone. If I was not cool before I was definitely cool now. I

could now start a “friend” group under my contact info. I could even assign a different ringtone to this group. My family group would have some company. I was cool. My phone was cooler. It allowed me to carry my family and my friend with me whenever I wanted. As my friends started to increase I played with my phone even more. I would scroll down my friend group. I felt important having so many friends although saving a person’s number into my phone did not necessarily make us friends. Sometimes exchanging numbers was just a formality. There were names and numbers that simply padded my friend group but did nothing more. I never called or texted them nor they me. In fact, most of the numbers I had served no purpose. They simply rested in my friend group. Seeing their numbers at least made me feel important so they were not completely useless.

Once again I only had a handful of who I considered friends or people worth calling. Still, I rarely called or texted any of them but knowing that I had them and I could contact them if I wanted to was satisfying. They would contact me sometimes but still not wanting to be particularly available I would simply claim that “I did not get your text”, “had my phone on silent” or “was in the kitchen and did not hear my phone which was in my room”. Or I would turn my phone off for an extended period of time which obviously made avoiding calls and text messages that much easier. *“The subscriber you have dialed is not available at present. Please try your call again later.”* The automated voice recording gave the best excuse of all. The caller had to accept that I was not available – even if I was. If I was asked why my phone was off I could come up with an excuse easily enough but for the most part, I rarely had too. When my phone was off I was simply not available and that was that. I love the fact that I can hide behind my cell phone and that is how I hide. Cell phones are not perfect. Contrary to popular belief they do not guarantee availability all the time. Things happen. Signals drop. Functions fail. And people lie.

My cell phone could keep a secret better than anyone I knew. I cannot tell you all the times that my phone rang and I deliberately looked at who was calling and chose not to answer even if it was a close friend. I knew I would see them soon enough and we could talk

then. Sometimes I did not bother to see who was calling I just did not answer. Not because I am mean I just hate talking on the phone. If anything I prefer to text. Texting avoids the awkward silence that fills the air when you do not have anything else to say. I rarely have anything worthwhile to say and if I do I would rather say it in person. The caller might have something important to say but the way I see it: if you (or someone we both know) are not sick, dead, dying or pregnant then it can either wait until we meet in person or at least be hinted at or stated fully in a text message until then, or emailed. I know that is not always the case but it works for me. Some people may have wondered why I had a cell phone at all since I was unavailable so much of the time. I can imagine how annoying I must have been to some people. I am sorry but that is how I am.

Text messages are also easy to avoid and when it suited me, like being invited somewhere that I did not want to go, I avoided them well. But I did not always ignore or avoid them. It is a lot easier for me to turn someone down through text message than by voice. If I did not avoid the message altogether in preparation for saying “I didn’t get your text” sometimes followed by “my phone’s been acting weird lately” (I had to make it believable), I would ‘gently’ turn the person down unless of course I did want to meet them somewhere. My cell phone probably thought I was the meanest and most dishonest person in the world. I could not blame it but it could not talk so any bad feelings remained unknown to me.

It was weird. I guess I was still not used to having a cell phone. I was not used to being so easily accessible or contacted so frequently. I had bought my phone mainly to keep close touch with my family but even that need began to fade. The daily phone calls and text messages to my family soon graduated to page long emails which then graduated to a paragraph, perhaps two. I no longer needed them with me all the time. I was settling in. Oh how easy it was for me to hide behind my cell phone. As I starting calling less and less I would claim that the calls were too expensive and ate up too much of my airtime (it is cheaper for me to call home than for them to call me so I usually made contact although sometimes my parents phoned me). I

was devious. I would deliberately call during the Cape Town morning hours which were New York's night and claim that I forgot about the time difference and understood that *they* could not talk. (See how I played around.) Sometimes I would call or text during hours when I knew they were at work or school. And because they did not really know my schedule, they would call me and I would text a reply at my leisure claiming that I was busy or just blame the time difference. That a cell phone can easily move between public and private spaces also worked in my favor. I could claim I was in the library or at church where I could not speak when in fact I was sitting comfortably at home. If I sensed an uncomfortable conversation coming on I could claim to be with company that I could not speak in front of. Because the key feature of a cell phone is its mobility, the trick was to claim that I had company in a way that I could not escape so the caller could not suggest that I move to a place where I could talk freely. I had thought these things through.

My cell phone gave me freedom. It gave me freedom from my family at home and my friends in Cape Town. It was my phone and only I would answer it. It was not like at home when I received a call on my landline that could have been answered by someone else. I could answer or ignore my phone as often as I wanted or I could just keep it off and that was fine with me. Yes, we were a team. My phone would not tell my secrets. And even though I did not use it to communicate as often I was obliged to it still made me feel important. I was still cool simply because I had it. I used to feel that cell phones were more dangerous than landlines. If someone calls your home you could by chance not be there and miss the call. A cell phone, however, you carry with you and therefore you can be reached anywhere but there were ways around that. Cell phones were so easy to manipulate. Owning one was like the best thing that ever happened to me. I was hooked. *How did* I function without a cell phone? They are perfect companions. But I would soon find out that they come with a price.

Being mugged

Unfortunately, I was mugged one late afternoon while walking home to my flat in Observatory. The experience was very traumatic as I had never been mugged in New York. It seemed to happen in slow motion. This guy came up to me, grabbed my arm, and placed it behind my back pushing it into the other side of my stomach and said: “Listen here, I don’t want to hurt you. Where’s the money? Where’s the phone?” He took my money and my phone. I was so scared during the incident that I urinated on myself. He left me there phoneless, moneyless, with a sore arm, back and side and urine stained jeans. I ran. I ran home as fast as I could in wet denim. When I got home I cried and cried and cried. I cried in the bath. I cried in my bed. Unfortunately I could not call my family to tell them what happened. I had no phone. This was why I bought it in the first place. If ever I needed to share something with my family it was then at that very moment: a scary moment. I should have been able to call them right away, that was the whole point. But I had no phone. I cried. The tears were not for the possessions I had lost or the embarrassment I later felt after coming home to my flat mates having urinated on myself. I cried because I was mugged. I had never experienced anything like that before.

The memory of being mugged stayed with me for a while. I often replayed the incident over and over again in my head. I thought about the phone I lost. I lost my baby. Why had I not left it home that day? Or what if I had not had a phone at all? What would have happened then? Would the money alone have been enough to satisfy my mugger? He was so lucky. He got away with my first love. My phone was conniving. So what if it was only an object. It betrayed me. After all we had been through it was now someone else’s. It was probably sold for much less than I bought it for; the SIM-card removed relieving any traces of me, my family and my friends. Surely its next owner would have owned a phone before. It would not be their first phone. They would not cherish it the way I did. Of course they would not wipe it down after excessive holding. The screen

would be foggy and smudged. Fingerprints would cloud its chic complexion. It was *my* baby. Why did he take it? Somehow the phone was at fault. It left me to fend for myself. It cheated me. Silly me, I had not thought to save any of my numbers outside of my phone. I was lost. I had no contacts. I had nothing to play with or keep me company during the day. I had nothing to look at. I had no games. I had no phone. I was no longer cool. I hated that phone. It was not mine anymore.

Later that week I bought a new one. I did not go to the shops to find a replacement. I did not want a replacement. Never again would I put that much energy into anything that could disappear just like that. I wanted a phone not a new baby. Looking at the phones behind the counter I thought to myself: “I will never care that much again”. I bought a cheap black phone for less than R300. I did not want it to be beautiful. I did not want those added features. This phone would have as little resemblance as possible to the first. It could make/receive calls and send/receive messages. That was all I needed. With a phone like that, I could not care less if it was stolen. It would not hurt so much. There would be no intimate history behind this phone. It was nothing; a piece of junk that I would have no pride in. The one thing it got that my first phone did not get was my preparation. I would be smart this time. I would save my numbers in an excel spread sheet. This phone would not outsmart me like my baby did. No way. I would be prepared.

My new phone-my enemy

I was different now. I was flying solo. I was no longer part of a team. I liked it that way. I did not realize that I had become so dependent on my phone and that reality scared me. I lived my life perfectly fine without a cell phone at home. How did I let my phone consume so much of me? That would never happen again. My new phone was nothing more than absolute necessary communication. I carried it with me just as much as I did my first but did not coo over it. It stayed in my pocket most of the time. This phone was not my

baby. It was an inanimate object that was not worth the attention. Still, it was easy to blame my phone when my social life was not what I wanted. I had convinced myself that it was pretty much worthless and yet it had so much responsibility. It was my primary source of communication. If I was expecting a call or a text from someone and I did not receive it, I automatically checked to make sure my phone was on. Sometimes I even turned it off and turned it back on again to confirm beyond any doubt that it was on. If it was on, I checked the volume. The problem, you see, had to be my phone. It could not be that I was being stood up. It must have been the phone. And so it was the phone who I took my anger out on.

I hated my phone when things did not work out. I would turn it off and put it away. Fine. You want to act moody? You want to go silent on me when I am waiting for a call or message? Fine, you go in my drawer. I might take it out and turn it on later to see if it wanted to behave but as far as I was concerned, it could stay in the drawer until the next day. It was ugly anyway. The drawer was the perfect place for it. If I was to turn on my phone the next day to find that I had not received any messages or missed calls, only then would I realize that it was the person and not my phone although I knew that already. It was just easier to accept that my phone was malfunctioning rather than admit the obvious. It happened pretty often too. Hmph, I guess I was not as cool as I thought or maybe I just had the wrong friends. It is funny how many times I blamed my phone when I was deliberately avoiding someone. I guess that was all catching up with me. Having a cell phone could be the highlight of my day or make me miserable. It was just as easy to feel insignificant as it was to feel important with a cell phone. They were not so easy after all. They involve you emotionally. That is the one thing that is not written in the direction manual.

The transition

It needs to be mentioned that I still only use a cell phone in Cape Town. I find the transition from having a cell phone to not having

one smooth enough. When I come home for vacation, however, I miss my cell phone but it is not that I miss having a cell phone in particular. I miss it in relation to everything I miss about Cape Town. I miss it the same way I miss the mountain, a particular restaurant or my friends in Cape Town. It represents part of my life (sometimes good, sometimes bad) in Cape Town. If I had a cell phone before I came to Cape Town then my cell phone would not hold any real significance in my experience abroad and it would not be one of the things I missed. I still do not feel that I need a cell phone at home. I can still get by without one and having experienced being a cell phone user in Cape Town I have been there and done that. There is no curiosity. I have, on occasion, been relegated to buying items unnecessarily just to accumulate enough change to use a payphone (I am in the habit of carrying a few coins for such an occasion but sometimes those run out unexpectedly) and that has been annoying. It is then that I curse myself for not having a cell phone but it still has not changed my mind. Even now the confused looks and questions remain when I confess that I do not have a cell phone only now it is slightly different when I admit that I have a cell phone but it has a South African SIM card and cannot work at home. It would be quite simple just to get an international SIM card so that I can use the phone at home and abroad but I do not want to. I do not need to, yet. I am still a rebel and that is fine with me.

Our current relationship

I replaced the phone I bought after I was mugged a few months later. I paid just R400 for my new phone so it was still fairly cheap. I replaced it for one that was a little nicer to look at, smaller and had a little more flexibility with its functions. I bought that phone in November of 2008 and I am still using it today. I have gotten used to that phone. It is not my baby but it has gotten me through some pretty rough times and I have grown to appreciate it. I appreciate it a little differently than I did my baby. My baby was great for style and companionship. It kept me busy when I was bored and made me

look cool, or so I would like to think. My current phone has been my lifeline. It was helpful to me during some really hard times. One of those times was September of 2009. I will never forget that month. I was a Master's student then. Stressed, anxious, tired and everything else that comes along with writing a thesis and hoping to submit in the next couple weeks, my body had given up on me way before I gave up on myself. Sitting in my room one afternoon feeling every bit of discomfort that an unhealthy routine of spending the night in the computer lab, rushing home for a quick shower, then spending the morning in the library and neglecting to eat properly would have on a body, I tried to rest. The stress of the past few weeks was really catching up to me and I was beginning to feel sick. I called my mom. Like a little girl, I wanted my mommy. I wanted her comfort. She reassured me and prayed with me over the phone. It was a nice conversation. Once again I attempted to sleep.

A little later, my stomach started to hurt. Was I hungry? Luckily I had prepared a sandwich when I came home to shower that morning which I had not eaten. I ate it. Trying to get comfortable again I adjusted my pillows and covered my body. In a matter of minutes I felt my stomach tighten and my mouth start to quiver. I went to the bathroom and vomited into my toilet. Too weak to get up, I rested my head on the toilet seat. Oddly enough that was the best place for me since I continued throwing up for the next hour. Finally feeling like I could get to my room before the next cycle of vomiting, I got my phone. Back in the bathroom, I texted a good friend of mine to tell her that I was not well and that I had been vomiting for almost two hours. Around that same time my flat mate came home. Seeing the state I was in, she took my phone and after asking who she should contact she and my good friend agreed that I should go to the hospital. While waiting for my friend to drive to our residence, I sat in the bathroom being pampered by my flat mate and texted another friend to come and pray for me. She came to my room and prayed for me just as my mother did. I could hardly sit still while she prayed as I was still vomiting. When she finished, she talked to me a little and then started talking to my flat mate. They talked about me like I

was not there, one asking what happened and the other answering questions. I did not mind. I liked having them there. They just let me be. There was not much they could do but I was grateful for the company. They waited with me until my friend came with transport and then I was driven to the hospital.

While in the hospital I contacted my friend and classmate to let her know that I was ill and would not be attending class the next day. She responded immediately via text message at which point I was vomiting again and did not respond that day. I ended up being admitted in the hospital and was there for four days and three nights. Not wanting to worry my mother, I did not call or text her during my stay. I felt lonely and scared but was amazed at how quickly my phone filled up with text messages of well wishes and offers to help if need be. I was even sent the number of guy that I did not know but was recommended by a friend of a friend who would be available to drive me home from the hospital. I did not respond to all the messages but kept all of them on my phone and read through some when I was awake and not vomiting. Having been immobilized and off campus for the past few days, my MA supervisor called me to see how I was doing as I had not responded to any of her emails. I explained to her that I was sick and had just left the hospital earlier that day. After a brief conversation, she too blessed my cell phone with a text of well wishes and recommendations towards getting better. Everybody was so considerate and helpful. I really wanted my mother while I was sick. Had I not wanted to worry her, I could have called or texted her every day while I was in the hospital to be comforted like I was when I first began to feel sick. Though I did not have my mother's comfort I was comforted by friends and even people that I did not know. I was happy to have a cell phone. It was times like that when I really appreciated it and do not know how different the situation would have been if I had not had one.

So, as much as I never wanted to 'love' or even 'like' my phone it has become somewhat special to me but again I say not in the way that my baby was. I guess I am more appreciative of the concept of having a cell phone rather than impressed with the phone itself. And

though I appreciate my current phone I would not fall apart if it phone was stolen. I would be annoyed at having to purchase another one but it would not hurt as much as it did when my baby was stolen. Today, I guess my phone and I are on good terms.

The smart phone

Actually, I currently have two phones. Fancy that. I went from being cell phoneless to owning two cell phones (both of which I only use in Cape Town). I purchased a second phone at the start of my Doctoral fieldwork. Purchasing my new phone was almost as exciting as it was to buy my first phone despite everything I had been through. Unlike most females, I hate shopping for clothes or anything but naturally, shopping for anything new is at least a little exciting. I was tired the day that I bought it and was tempted to wait until another day but I had just presented my research proposal and was cleared to start my research. This new phone was to be a tool that I would use to communicate within the field site. Having a second phone with a different number, I thought, would be beneficial (this turned out to be true). I would have a separate number for the participants and friends that I made in my field site. This way my personal life and my research life could be separate. When I am out of the field, that phone is turned off. Having been in the field for just over three months, there are times when I want to get as far away from the field site as possible. Though I live in my field site, I would sometimes return to my own flat for the weekend to get a break from the field. Taking a break meant that I was physically out of the field site and turning off my fieldwork cell phone meant that I could not even be reached at all.

This time I did not even try to hide the fact that I *did* want a fancy phone. I knew I wanted a smart phone. I did not want a blackberry because I held one once and it did not fit comfortably in my hand. It was nice but too wide. I had seen my friend's Nokia business phone and thought it was nice. I held it and it fit well. I was intimidated by the keypad as it is like a keyboard, not at all what I am

used to. I have long fingernails and big hands. I wondered how uncomfortable it would be to type messages on this kind of keypad. My other phone has a regular keypad and I found it easy enough to text with my thumb. With the newer keypad I would have to use both hands. Still, that was not enough to discourage me from wanting that kind of phone. After asking some questions about the functions of her smart phone, I decided that I would get the same or a similar phone. She actually accompanied me to the mall. Her phone was too expensive so I settled for a similar phone that was also pricy but cheaper than hers. I bought a black Nokia smart phone. Compared to my baby (my first phone), it is actually quite boring to look at. My baby was silver and black and shiny. My smart phone is a dull kind of black. I chose a nice blue wallpaper background for my display screen which brightens its otherwise ordinary appearance when the phone is in use. It is also taller and wider than my baby was but slightly thinner. It cannot fit comfortably in the palm of my hand nor can it fit easily in any of my jean pockets but it is still a nice phone.

It really was just a game. All I wanted was a phone that could take pictures and had Internet access: two features my current phone did not have. I figure I could avoid carrying my digital camera in the field at all times if my phone had a camera. I also wanted to experience the luxury of being able to check my email on my phone. The man behind the counter showed me a couple of phones which had those features but were not smart phones. The phones were nice but I wanted a smart phone because they looked so fancy. I had changed. Having any phone was not enough to make me feel cool anymore. I had to have a smart phone which looked cool and was cool to have because almost everybody has one, now. Though the phone I bought was expensive and not completely necessary, I did not regret the purchase. I had begun to regret the purchase only later that day when I started to explore the phone. It is not so much that I regretted buying a smart phone in particular I was just not prepared for the amount of features that I was confronted with. I was overwhelmed by the options. I was agitated and did not understand why anyone would need so many features. I probably should have waited until the

next day to explore my new phone because I was tired but I was excited. I questioned what I would do with so many functions and concluded that I would never use most of them. The problem was though, that even the functions that I was used to, like saving numbers and sending text messages, seemed so much harder on this phone. The direction manual, though written in English, was unclear and seemed to be inconsistent. Finally saving my personal cell phone number and my research assistant's number in my smart phone I was happy that I had done something right but that was short lived. Though I had saved those two numbers I wanted to personalize my ringtone. Compared to my current phone which held just a handful of ringtones, the smart phone had way too many options. Who is supposed to sit here and sample all of these I thought. Deciding that I would do that the next day, I tried out the Internet. Using the Google search engine was easy but trying to set up my e-mail so that I could receive emails through my phone was not. Again the direction manual did not help much. I was coming to the conclusion that I did not like my phone and put it away for the night.

After getting help with setting up my email and securing a pleasant ringtone I was all set. My new phone was great. I loved looking at the features even if I was never going to use them. Most of all I loved having the Internet on my phone. The fact that using the Internet did not use too much of my airtime was even better. Living in the field meant that I did not have constant Internet access. I was used to the luxury of checking my e-mail twice a day from my flat in Rondebosch before moving to my field site. In the field, however, I would have been a slave to the Internet café if I had not had my smart phone. There are three main Internet café's in my field site but I was not particularly close to any of them and they were usually full or out of order when I went. My phone brought back the luxury of checking my mail and I also enjoy being able to check the weather via the Internet. It is also a lot more convenient to use my phone instead of turning on a laptop and waiting for it to start up before accessing the Internet. With my phone, it is almost instant.

Both before and after I got used to my smart phone, I often compared it to my personal phone. I feel like people hear me better on my smart phone so that may be a plus but the truth is, as fancy as my smart phone is, my personal phone is much easier to use. My personal phone is small and compact. It feels more comfortable in my hands when I am using it. Texting is also much more comfortable for me with my personal phone because I am used to the keypad. My personal phone is simple where my smart phone, and all of its options, is overwhelming although I have grown more comfortable with its set up. Since being mugged, I sometimes feel uncomfortable carrying my smart phone. With my personal phone being small I can conceal it much easier than I can my smart phone. Even though it is not particularly nice to look at and I have not grown particularly fond of it yet, as expensive as the smart phone was, I would hate for it to be stolen.

Over all though, I like and use both phones. It is great to have that personal/work phone separation particularly when I want a break from the field. I turn on my fieldwork phone for a few minutes at a time during my breaks just to see if anyone has called or texted me. I am still emotionally affected by these moments. I am usually anxious during the brief moment that it takes my phone to initialize. Will I have any missed calls or text messages? I anxiously listen for the ‘ding ding, ding ding’ alert sound that will answer this question. I still tend to feel bad or neglected if I have no missed calls or messages and I admit that I sometimes still assume that it is some fault of the phone. I still feel important when I receive calls or text messages. Actually, I feel even more important now that I am in the field. My fieldwork cell phone is much more active than my personal cell phone and I feel needed. Somehow having this phone confirms my existence as a researcher; a researcher conducting fieldwork with active participants. And though I am not naïve enough to think that all the people in my field site who call me are my friends or want to be my friends, they make me feel better as a person. It is nice to feel like someone who people want to talk to. Do not get me wrong. I still do not always pick up my phone or return the “please call me’s”

that I receive almost on a daily basis but they certainly do something for my self-esteem. Yes, my phones still have that power over me.

So, there you have it. Now I have two phones that I appreciate. I do not love them to death but I definitely do not take them for granted. It is what it is. I need them for easy communication especially because I still do not have a landline. I still text much more than I talk. I still hate talking on the phone. I still use my cell phone to get out of things I want to avoid but I expect that will never change. Everyone does that from time to time. I guess that is part of the appeal of the cell phone. It is for me anyway. I love the fact that I can hide behind my cell phone.

Are Mobile Phones the New Talking Drums of Everyday Africa?²

Some scholars (Nyamnjoh 2005; Ekine 2010; Essoungou 2011; Fox 2011) indicate that mobile and Internet technology are demonstrating social changes in Africa and that these social changes, driven by the forces of people's local needs, are appropriately designed to respond quickly to specific events and political changes. The introduction of ICTs, Ekine (2010) suggests, "means that people at grassroots levels can think about what works for them and how they can use technology to foster social change and collective action" (x-xi). The use of the mobile phone, the latest technology to be domesticated on the continent (Nyamnjoh 2005), in particular, in Africa is growing faster than anywhere else in the world. Currently, Africa has a larger market of mobile phone users than North America. Rarely has there been a faster adoption of a particular technology and with greater innovation (Essoungou 2011) as has been the case in Africa.

De Bruijn *et al* 2009 tell us that communication in Africa has gone through a multitude of changes since the introduction of mobile technology (p. 11). Mobile phones in particular have created a world of opportunities for different groups of people across the African continent resulting in both positive and negative outcomes. The book does well in portraying how such mobile technology has contributed to the (re-)shaping of social realities within certain countries in Africa. More importantly, the book stresses the simultaneous shaping of mobile technology within these societies, a revelation that can too

² This chapter is a critical review of: De Bruijn, Mirjam., Nyamnjoh, Francis B. & Inge Brinkman's (eds.) 2009. *Mobile Phones: The New Talking Drums of Everyday Africa* Langaa, Cameroon; Lieden, the Netherlands: African Studies Center ISBN: 9956558532 (pbk)

easily be taken for granted. It reveals that in Africa, both the mobile phone service providers and their users have impacted each other to define and redefine the mobile phone beyond its applications in Europe and North America (Scannel 2011:163). Western intentions and ideologies around the ‘proper’ uses of such technologies as well as the notion of technological determinism are beaten down in a subtle but thorough manner as the eleven contributing authors present a variety of ICT appropriations across the continent. However, while these authors succeed in relating societal and technological (re-)shaping between people and mobile technologies and introducing some of their creative appropriations, the very exciting and attractive title of the book, presented as a proclamation, leaves one questioning whether mobile phones are indeed the new talking drums of everyday Africa.

Having researched the role of ICTs, the mobile phone in particular though not excluding the Internet, among marginalized populations within Africa, these eleven authors aim to show how the mobile phone has been used within these populations as a means of social interaction and development. The mobile phone, an essential item for many of the people represented in the book, has, on the one hand, been described as a “welcomed” and “necessary accessory” (de Bruijn *et al* 2009:147) beneficial for compressing distance, stimulating agency, upgrading and maintaining prestige and social status among individuals and creating social and economic opportunities that were formerly impossible. On the other hand, however, the mobile phone has been described as an “unsatisfactory”, “hindrance” (p. 147), disrupting social relationships by eliminating most or all face-to-face interaction, facilitating crime, increasing competition and creating or reproducing social inequalities within societies.

The central arguments presented suggest that techno-social relationships are mutual rather than casual (p. 70) and that mobile phone appropriation within these particular African populations need not be interpreted as a falling away from Westernized intentions for using this technology. Rather, mobile phones have simply presented opportunities for the potential and creativity that have already always

been part of their individual means of communicating and survival. While acknowledging the integration of the mobile phone into the lives of the societies represented and the constant shifting of this technology between a necessary accessory and an unsatisfactory hindrance, there is no mention of the former use of talking drums before the introduction of the mobile phone in any of the societies represented. If in fact the mobile phone is the new talking drum of everyday Africa, it is not clear for whom this is so. Furthermore, the authors seemingly take for granted that the reader has some knowledge of the history of talking drums. In this sense, they neglect to provide even the most basic information regarding talking drums: who used them, when they were used, why they were used, did they succeed in doing what they were supposed to do, were they successful means of communication, and are they still currently being used anywhere in the continent. Without any of this information, how is the reader to process the title?

This area of information, left unattended, in relation to the title, leads the reader to understand that the introduction of the mobile phone has somehow conquered and replaced the talking drum in intent and purpose. In reality these communication devices, while similar, should be treated as two separate forms of mobile communication and not simply by identifying one as traditional and the other modern. I do not pretend that the resemblance in the potential of these communication devices is irrelevant nor do I suggest that a comparison between the two has no place. The title of the book, for me, was enticing and I can appreciate its foundation because the mobile phone in one sense could be described as (or compared to) a new talking drum – that is to say the mobile phone is a newer type of communication device with similar primary responsibilities as the talking drum. Still, while the title captures the reader's attention it is important that they understand its implications if they are, upon finishing the book, to accept the contents of the book as enough validation for such a title.

This paper argues that while mobile phones, as they are represented by the authors, have the same primary function as talking

drums: to communicate with others (at will) in spite of distance, there are significant differences in their intentions, potentials, and appropriations. It questions whether they should indeed be considered the new talking drums of everyday Africa or if, instead, they should be seen only as communication alternatives not replacements. It is my opinion that neither one of the two is necessarily at risk of being replaced by the other. Acknowledging that the modernization of tradition could potentially eliminate any and all use of talking drums in future generations, the birth of the mobile phone, already implicated in the gradual death of the talking drum should not also be too readily identified as its reincarnation. Instead the mobile phone could be thought of as a kind of fraternal twin, different in physique and personality (born more than a few minutes apart of course). Mobile phones have become an alternative means of communication for recent generations and to members of older generations who have willingly embraced the mobile phone. In this paper I address the benefits, disadvantages and various appropriations of the mobile phone as presented in the different chapters of the book and other readings. I then talk a little bit about talking drums. My own readings on talking drums, though few, helped me to compare and contrast the talking drum with the mobile phone both from what I have read and through my own experience as a mobile phone user living in a mobile generation and I present those findings below.

Mobile Phones

In many parts of Africa the mobile phone has come to represent more than a communication tool of luxury accessed only by an elite few. It has become an accessible necessity for both privileged and underprivileged individuals and has been essential in the day-to-day lives of many African peoples, particularly marginalized populations, for "... the possibilities it offers them to communicate and in how it facilitates the production, reproduction, and transformation of social networks, social status and hierarchies (de Bruijn *et al* 2009:15).

Marginalized populations are increasingly finding new ways to acquire the mobile phone and use it towards their benefit.

This mobile technology seems to be a welcomed device, embraced by individuals eager to reap from its assumed benefits (de Bruijn *et al* 2009; Horst & Miller 2006). It could also be argued, however, that the use of mobile phones is a forced “choice” as there is a lack of (commonly used) alternatives. There is evidence that low-income users are using mobile phones that they cannot afford (Sithole 2004 cited in Tlabela 2007:8). It has also been observed (Gillwald *et al* 2005: 8 cited in Tlabela *et al* 2007) that poorer mobile phone users are in certain circumstances prepared to sacrifice food for airtime because they view their mobile phone as essential to their survival. It is believed – believed by many but a reality to few – that those with access to ICTs can significantly benefit in the following dimensions: social, financial, educational, and recreational and health (Tlabela *et al* 2007: 25) making the mobile phone, for example, an understandable object of lust. In any case, the mobile phone has led to several social changes which have been documented in several parts of Africa. It is important to note however that this technology does not present everyone with the same effects. The only certain outcomes of the mobile phone, as expressed in the book, have been: social hierarchy, competition and inequality. Despite these undesirable features, the mobile phone continues to be widely regarded and valued as an essential means of meaningful survival.

Some scholars argue that mobile phones facilitate development, economic growth, enhance lives, empower citizens and have the benefit of bringing about social change (Orgeret & Ronning 2009). However, none of these benefits should be readily assumed outcomes of ICT use. Marcus Leaning (2005) suggests that social change is not necessarily a direct outcome from ICTs like the mobile phone. Leaning tell us that ICTs operate differently in different societies and need to be understood as being ‘modal’. They “may be used in a particular way in one society but in a different way in another (p. 36).” It should not be taken for granted that the introduction of ICTs will bring about social change. On the contrary,

“the ability of an ICT to bring about social change is tied very much to the social form of the society...” in which it has been introduced. Local appropriations of ICTs are linked to the social organization of a society more so “than any qualities that the technology itself is understood to possess (p. 35-9). Cultural tradition also plays a considerable role in the appropriation of ICTs despite the heavy reliance on Western ideas of proper or appropriate uses of these technologies. ICTs will be interpreted and appropriated within the social frameworks of the society that they are in (2005).

Concerning the introduction of new ICTs, all societies, should learn to master and keep abreast of particular technologies (i.e. mobile phones and the Internet) that are strategically decisive in each historical period in order to communicate effectively. Though mastery of technology does not determine historical evolution and social change, it does embody a society’s capabilities of utilizing these technologies towards their maximum benefit (Castells 2000: 7; Mushengyezi 2003: 115). As the information economy and its associated technologies continue to penetrate the everyday lives of African (and other) societies, an ability to access, adapt and create new knowledge using these new communication technologies is critical for securing and maintaining social inclusion (Warschaver 2003:9 in Tlabela *et al* 2007). Mobile phones in particular have been credited with producing new opportunities for the re-negotiation of social relations and spaces in creative and innovative ways (de Bruijn *et al* 2009).

Sometimes, however, more than a desire to secure social inclusion, mobile phones and other ICTs are sought after simply because of their convenience. In my own experience and within my close circle of friends I have observed that human beings tend to always want the easy way out. We want to get through our day completing different tasks and attending to obligations in a timely manner with as little effort as possible. Mobile technologies are suitable for this type of lifestyle. People tend to decide whether a tool is useful or even pleasurable depending on how fast they can make a connection (Hanson 2007). For many, the mobile phone and the

Internet are the epitome of usefulness and pleasure in their accessibility and convenience. The mobile phone, a physically attractive and compact device, has both captivated and held captive many an individual. Still, not all who are presented with the option of the mobile phone embrace the opportunity and not everyone who willingly embraces it is completely satisfied (whether they were expecting to be or not).

De Bruijn *et al* (2009) indicate that for every advantage of the mobile phone there is a disadvantage. Mobile phones, first of all, compress distance. They accelerate mobility in their compression of time and space. They provide opportunities for staying in touch with friends and family members and lovers separated by distance. They serve as a coping mechanism for long periods of separation (p. 15-6). The mobile phone, then, can be credited with creating, maintaining and restoring relationships threatened by distance. Lilly Loveless, the main character of Nyamnjoh's *Married But Available* (2009) was a PhD student researching the concepts of sex, power and consumption in Mimboland. During her research, she came across several couples who, refusing to let distance ruin their relationship, used the mobile phone (and/or the Internet) to communicate and even be intimate with each other as if distance were not an obstacle. After much research, Loveless noted that

with the advent of technologies such as the Internet, Skype and webcams, [most of which can be accessed via an adequate (3G) mobile phone], intimacy can reinvent itself beyond the original confines of physical proximity such that you don't have to be together in the same space to drink, eat and make love together. These technologies invite people to manipulate time and space in ways that interconnect the real and the virtual and suggest new forms of relationships (p. 420).

Loveless' research revealed one couple who, used to having coffee together every morning before distance became a problem, strategically used the cell phone to continue their coffee dates. The woman explained that since her lover left "We SMS and call to synchronize the making of coffee, then sit and chat as we sip (p.

240).” In my own experience of moving abroad and leaving my family behind, my mobile phone was significant in keeping my family close to me ensuring constant availability to them despite being out of the country. An “umbilical cord” to use Pelckmans’ (in de Bruijn *et al* 2009: 28) term is exactly what my mobile phone was; connecting me to my family ensuring that words of comfort and encouragement were delivered at all the right times. It pacified my initial weeks abroad when I was homesick and wanting my family.

However, as a periodical remedy to communicating with those separated by distance, the mobile phone can too quickly become the dominant or only means of communication eliminating family visits, stunting relationship growth between lovers and even limiting the student/supervisor relationships to mobile phone contact only for example, gradually wiping out the sometimes necessary physical, face-to-face social interactions that ensure meaningful relationships and clear(er) interpretations of communication. And while the compression of distance may be helpful the mobile phone can also serve as a means to ensure that certain obligations and remittances that might have deliberately been neglected or avoided are tended to (p. 78) where those obligations may otherwise have been cushioned by distance.

We also learn that owning a mobile phone has the ability to award prestige, importance, upgrade social status and can potentially credit one as an individual of sufficient economic standing even when their lack of other basic essential items should indicate otherwise. Though mobile phones have become increasingly affordable (maintaining airtime once a phone is purchased is the primary financial hurdle. However, the nature of ‘pay as you go’ plans in particular provide poorer mobile phone users with an opportunity to budget and recharge their phones whenever possible (Skuse & Cousins 2009:190), and is no longer accessible only to the excessively rich, owning a mobile phone still has the power to suggest that one is financially stable. Still, the mobile phone as a much desired object, despite its increasing accessibility both facilitates and is the motivation behind many crimes (de Bruijn *et al* 2009:81) for people

wanting to be a part of the mobile generation – and the social allowance that comes with it – with few means of accessing a phone and of course those who simply want someone else’s phone to sell for profit (knowing that a mobile phone is a guaranteed sale).

Some women (see Chapter 4 pp. 69-92) spoke of being lured on dates via their mobile phones and upon meeting their partners were robbed of their jewelry and phones. When I first arrived in Cape Town I was told never to carry my phone haphazardly lest it will be stolen. Eventually being mugged and becoming an unfortunate statistic in addition to hearing other stories of people robbed of their phones in Cape Town I would be inclined to agree that the mobile phone can increase crime although this is not the case at my home in Brooklyn, New York. As a desired object, the mobile phone is often the first and sometimes only thing taken in a robbery. Despite their association with crime, it has been said that mobile phones increase feelings of safety, particularly for women. They are credited with rendering “certain situations safer and more practical (p. 27)” where a call for help can be made at the first signs of trouble. However, as they are susceptible to weather, trauma and sometimes inexplicable malfunction (even if only for a brief period), we can acknowledge their potential for increasing feelings of safety but the extent to which they can provide should be relied on with caution.

The mobile phone also increases levels of agency creating opportunity for people to be active participants in the daily routines that make up their lives. They also have the potential to create job opportunities for some or accelerate business growth in some work environments. Mobile technology has created a space for the women of Khartoum for example (see Chapter 4 pp. 69-92), to be empowered. This we see by the behavior (respectable or otherwise) of the women of Khartoum. They have appropriated this technology in a way that allows them to live (or pretend to live) in the way that is expected of them while at the same time securing social lives that are possible only through the mobile phone. The mobile phone mobilizes these women helping their daily businesses flourish by being accessible to clients. It also allows them to communicate freely

with males, a type of interaction normally frowned upon. The mobile phone in this sense has been blamed for sexually immoral behavior as it allows them to communicate, bond and sometimes pursue relationships with other men. It has been accused of leading to increased instances of infidelity and divorce. ‘Respectable’ behavior can be both easily maintained and avoided due to the mobile phone. As mobile phones are said to make lying easier, men and women of Khartoum, for example, find that they create a lack of trust in their formerly ‘respectable’ living environment (p. 74-80). It would seem then that the mobile phone as an enhancer of agency also carries a risk of losing trust creating social turmoil where all was once calm.

Talking Drums

Unlike modern information and communication technologies like the mobile phone and the Internet, talking drums were not a colonial means of communication. Drums, musical instruments turned communication devices, were manipulated to speak, alongside the telegraph and spoken word, as a method of spreading African news to Africans by Africans. Known as the birthplace of “conscious communication”, Africa and the communication systems used by its people were seen as strategic weapons and potential instruments to maximize local control. Drums were used to communicate with people separated by distance. Drum-talk was used to “distribute news, to complement and extend the voice and ease the course of information across the continent (Casely-Hayford 1998:18-20).”

It has been said (Casely-Hayford, 1998), despite the fact that drum messages are generally transmitted by breaking down sentences into small components as few are capable of sending complete sentences or whole utterances (p. 21), that drum language is not limited to a few sentences but, given a good drummer and listener, can communicate all man can say. More effectively, drums can speak musically where words cannot. They have the potential to elaborate, “... with their indefinable acoustic qualities (p. 22), where words may be limiting in their expression of emotion. When talking with drums,

however, messages must be sent, read and understood as full phrases if the language is to be interpreted accurately by the recipients. This is particularly necessary for the majority of people, the Yoruba for example, who “spoke/speak” drum language, because tones are more important than vowels or consonants. These tonal languages then make it almost impossible to understand a word in isolation from a full phrase. Furthermore, drum messages usually echo spoken local languages and when transmitted to far distances it is almost impossible to accurately translate a drummed message. Accurate message reception depended largely on how still the air was when the message was sent and still, “a message would need dozens, perhaps hundreds of translations...” to be read accurately, appropriately reflecting the spoken language. Drum-talkers as well as recipients of drum messages require great skill (p. 25, 27) to play and to understand. First time drum-talkers are sometimes blessed (blessing them, the drum and their intended message) before drumming for the first time. It is because of this that some drummers are seen as “both privileged and important (p. 24). While there was no mention of the receptor(s) of the message occasionally receiving a blessing, the ultimate effectiveness of the drum as a communication device depends on a receiver’s ability to decode a message (Nyamnjoh 1998:45) and I repeat that they too require great skill.

Are mobile phones the new talking drums of everyday Africa?

Is the mobile phone the new talking drum? Let us talk first about their intent. It is important to note, first of all, that neither talking drums nor mobile phones can stand alone. Both require conscious effort from people. Both work alongside spoken word and/or other forms of technology (telegraph, computers-Internet). Drums need people to transform into ‘talking’ drums. And even with the most skilled drummer, drum-talk can be hard to interpret. The mobile phone is credited as an all-purpose device that can stand alone when in reality they too fall short on their own. They can be communication bridges and outlets to the world but they can also fail

without proper channeling. The creation of both the talking drum and the mobile phone were intended to compress distance; offering a chance to communicate with those outside of verbal or otherwise direct reach. The drum was a musical instrument that had been assimilated to a communication tool (just as the drum had assimilated people into becoming drum talkers and listeners). The talking drum on the one hand was used to call people to dance, share stories, warn against danger, communicate important messages, broadcast community information and to communicate with the dead and the spirit world beyond (Casely-Hayford, 1998; Mushengyezi 2003: 108-11; Awa 2005: 219-20). The mobile phone on the other hand offers increased mobility by offering (but not guaranteeing) complete access to individuals at any time regardless of location. The mobile phone, however, does not allow (can they even facilitate?) communication with the dead or the spirit world. Whether or not they could be used in a séance or some such event could be possible outside of my knowledge. The mobile phone, in its multiple functions, can serve as a mini computer: accessing the Internet or serve as an alarm clock, calculator, game center, document center, voice and video recorder and instant messaging service at any time. The mobile phone became a qualification for prestige in addition to offering social and economic opportunities that were previously impossible. Talking drums could be used only to communicate messages and of course for entertainment.

The talking drum is far less intimate than the mobile phone. One drummer communicates a message to multiple recipients all the time. That was, after all, the intention of sending messages by drum. Personalized drum messages might well have been possible if the message was played for a particular individual whose ear had been trained to decode a special message where the majority could not. Though I did not read to the contrary, using the drum for personalized, one-to-one messaging seems unlikely. Talking drums could not penetrate one's privacy as the mobile phone could. Being reached by talking drum at any time of the day or night would suggest an emergency or some up-to-date information worthy to be

shared at that point in time. Drum messages were not sent lightly and were probably always regarded as important. The mobile phone however is very intimate. Calls and messages are sent only to recipients of the caller's choice. Though the option of sending messages to multiple recipients is also a luxurious benefit the sender has to do this intentionally. Most messages are received in private (regardless if the recipient is in a public place) revealed only to the recipient when checking their phone. SMS messages are not necessarily always important. Their context ranges from important emergencies, invitations, simple greetings, sharing jokes/gossip and so on. Some people send messages simply because they have nothing better to do. While mobile phones can be used more publically (social media uprisings for example), they are likely to be used intimately. Besides, mass communication via the mobile phone can be costly. The talking drum is free.

The mobile phone may be preferred to the talking drum because of its style, its social implications and its level of convenience. For one thing, messages sent by mobile phone can travel much further than those sent by drum. Mobile phones, though, are much more vulnerable. They require appropriate signals to work well and transmit calls, SMSes and access to the Internet and are therefore susceptible to bad weather and poor locations. Additionally they can easily be rendered unusable by falling or getting wet. And because of their small size they can sometimes end up lost or misplaced or in the worst case deliberately stolen. Drums as communication devices are less concerned with technical interruptions. They are bigger and one needs only to ensure that they strike the drum in the appropriate spots when relaying messages. They do, however, require special skills to play messages well but these skills can ultimately be made irrelevant if the winds are not compatible or if the message falls upon poor receptors which can too often be the case judging from the level of difficulty in proper translation of this tonal language.

Mobile phones do not require such skills as far as basic communication is concerned. Also, the tonal limitations of the drum as a tool of communication meant that drum messages were often

abbreviated and while this is necessary for drum language it quite possibly could have contributed to the misinterpretation of messages regardless of wind hence the value of good receptors. SMS messaging via the mobile phone on the other hand can be abbreviated as part of a trendy style, luxury; saving time while sending messages (i.e. 'gr8' instead of 'great'- although predictive text messaging can also save time) and of course to save airtime by limiting the amount of pages used per SMS. The misinterpretation of SMS messages are also quite possible with or without the abbreviation of words just as any lack of oral or visual communication can be. However, the use of symbols (i.e. ☺,!) can help clarify some messages eliminating misinterpretations. Also, SMS messages are tangible. They can be saved by the sender and recipient and can be referred to at later times if necessary. Drum messages, though repeated several times were finite. They disappeared into the wind after the drummer was finished living only in the memories of the recipients. Mobile phones have become a means memory for many.

While talking drums have the ability to make individuals seem privileged and important to others because of the blessings and spirituality surrounding the drum, mobile phones do the same simply with ownership as this brings almost automatic prestige and an assumption of wealth. This upgrade to prestigious and assumption of high economic standing results in social inequality both between the haves and the have not's as well as among the haves who rely on accessing better and fancier phones than the next person to maintain their new social standing. The mobile phone also implies that one is important because they receive calls from (important) people. This is one reason why people choose to wear their phones visibly. Talking drums are not visible markers of one's status. Though there are different types of talking drums they are not as visibly significant. You can look at the type of mobile phone displayed on a person and determine (rightfully or not) several things about them (importance, economic level, personal style), particularly if the phone is flashy or fancy, reflecting the latest model. Talking drums are visibly irrelevant. Their relevance lies only in the sounds that they can produce. There

are dozens of social implications at play when owning a mobile phone that do not factor in to being a drum-talker. Talking drums do not cause competition or social inequalities nor do they create and reinforce social hierarchies within societies. They have not been manipulated to the extent of the mobile phone to maintain and restore intimate relationships threatened by distance. They do not involve individuals on the personal level that mobile phones do causing social tension between drummers and even the content of messages. That is to say people can live without talking drums and still have a meaningful existence in their eyes and in the eyes of their social community; their social identities not standing in jeopardy. The very widespread acceptance of and need for the mobile phone and neglect of the drum and telephone is proof of this. But that is not to say that talking drums do not, for some, still serve a valuable purpose in a way that mobile phones never will.

Conclusion

The mobile phone may be the new president of communication but not because the talking drum had finished its term or even stepped down. The mobile phone, in Africa, was gradually forced into a position of presidency and, as it seems, widely embraced by many. Nyamnjoh (1998: 125) states that "... traditions are not only being modernized, but modernity is being traditionalized, and the outcome is triumph neither for tradition nor modernity as such but rather for the new creation issuing from the marriage of both." Traditional means of (long) distance communication were, among oral communication, done through the talking drum. Telegraphs and telephones were communication options that came later. Though the talking drum could be considered more of a mobilizing tool than the telephone which is a fixed-line phone limiting the receiver of the phone call and at times the caller to specific spaces from which they can communicate, the telephone it seems, offered a faster and more accurate approach to communicating: relaying messages and having conversations in real time independent of still winds that could carry

messages accurately. The mobile phone was introduced and was credited with performing even better than the telephone. One could say that the marriage of the talking drum to the telephone led to the “new creation” of the mobile phone. Actually, given that the mobile phone was a Western invention, it would not be right to say that the marriage of the two older forms of communication led to the creation of the mobile phone rather it led to some of the specific appropriations of this technology.

The mobile phone has relegated talking drums to being communication devices of the traditional past particularly because of their convenience and multiple use options and of course, the outside introduction of this technology into the African continent indicating a demand for its integration into everyday life. However, to call mobile phones the new talking drums of everyday Africa suggests that mobile phones have triumphed over the talking drum even as a preferred method of communication which may not be the case. While it may have triumphed over the talking drum in its convenience it has not done so in its initial responsibility as a communication device. If we agree that the widespread and various uses of the mobile phone were influenced by the benefits and potentials of the talking drum, telephone and other forms of communication leading to the modernization of those traditions, we should then be waiting in anticipation for the next fad in mobile communication among Africans when the mobile phone gets married to something else; when mobile phones become the *old* talking drums of everyday Africa.³

³ Though the purpose of this paper is to question the implications of such a title I ask the reader to allow my use and rewording of it here to make a point.

ICTs and the Making and Breaking of Everyday Relations⁴

Lilly Loveless, an eager PhD student from Muzunguland, is studying the concepts of sex, power and consumption in Mimboland. Through her research we learn sex and love among Mimbolandians are given and received, taken for granted and eventually become irrelevant as they become neglected in many relationships that may once have been considered happy marriages or affairs. Sex and sometimes love are constantly traded and intercepted in this ironic world where almost everyone is married yet are all still on the lookout for new relationships. Everyone is either married but available or is currently dating someone who is married but available (p. 78). Women go after married men simply because they have money. One woman stated that "...a poor married man is a waste of time" (p. 450). Men go after (younger) women because it gives them a sense of self-worth (p. 359). Where most marriages start off monogamously, it seems that almost all men eventually become inflicted with the *Mboma disease*: "the urge to cheat on [his] wife with younger unmarried women" (p. 201). In most relationships men are exploited for their money and women are exploited for their youth, beauty and sex. ICTs, particularly the cell phone and the Internet, have come to play a key role in the everyday making and breaking of relationships in Mimboland.

In Mimboland ICTs are quite valuable and are not to be taken for granted. In a world full of poverty, uncertainty and insecurity, technologies such as the cell phone and the Internet, help transform lives and offer new ways of getting by in everyday life. For the people of Mimboland, cell phones, in addition to other material wants, help

⁴ This chapter outlines the various appropriations of ICTs among the characters of Francis Nyamnjoh's (2009) *Married But Available*.

conquer poverty or at least disguise it. They upgrade social statuses and offer prestige where one may be lacking. They are dominant tools in a male's quest to attract females and they along with the Internet help create and maintain relationships between lovers. The book does portray rather mundane uses of the cell phone and the Internet as in the beginning when Lilly Loveless emailed Dr. Wiseman Lovemore of Mimboland to establish contact, secure a letter of affiliation needed to pursue her research and to ask for accommodation (p. 2-3), or when she calls her mother from her newly purchased cell phone shortly after arriving in Mimboland to let her know that she was ok (p. 22). These are classic, or one might say more commonly expected uses of these ICTs. However, at the heart of Lilly Loveless' research we start to see the more creative ways that the ICTs have come to be used in the maintenance of (long distance) relationships.

To have access to or to own such ICTs in Mimboland is not to be taken lightly. Once acquired these technologies are to be secured and kept safely in the hands of the owner lest they end up lost or stolen and taken as not being valued. We see a clear example of this when the very naïve Lilly Loveless accidentally leaves her phone in the taxi that she and her research assistant Britney were riding in. She called her phone several times hoping to attract the driver's attention. Loveless expected that the taxi driver, upon hearing her cell phone ring, would answer her phone, learn that the unclaimed phone was in fact Lilly's and return it to her. When realizing that this was not how events would turn out Britney explained to her that in the eyes of the taxi driver she let go of her phone, did not need it and must have enough money to buy a new one. She further justified the taxi driver's response to the situation by stating simply: "if it really mattered to you, it would still be with you as we speak" and "If you really needed it, you wouldn't lose it" (p. 157).

A very confused Lilly Loveless accused the taxi driver of being "a lion in sheepskin with her cell phone" (p. 157-58) because of his actions. It seemed to me, however, that the taxi driver was not a lion in sheepskin; he just took advantage of the opportunity. Maybe he

would never deliberately set out to mug someone for their phone by force but in this case he took the opportunity to keep/‘steal’ Lilly’s phone since she obviously did not need it because she ‘lost’ it. To him, his actions were probably quite rational (at least as rational as they seemed to Britney). From this example it is evident that the cell phone is an object so lusted after that a lost or misplaced cell phone can only be assumed to have been deliberately neglected by the owner. Everyone wants or needs a cell phone and once they get one losing it is not an option.

Cell phones make people feel and look important. In Mimboland, it is not enough just to have a cell phone. One must have it and wear it visibly so that others can see it. Having a cell phone first of all implies that one has money or is dating someone who has money. People like their phones to be noticed and they like to be noticed when they receive phone calls. Receiving phone calls in public is what makes people feel important. Some even go as far as to appoint friends to call them at specific times (in the public eye) so that others will think they are receiving important calls from their family abroad or elsewhere (p. 160-61). Having a cell phone means being able to receive calls anytime and anywhere and that is a prized ability. The cell phone is therefore “considered a luxury and as a tool of prestige, but also as something with much practical power” (p. 159) and displaying it visibly is, for some people, more important than actually using it. Lilly Loveless herself, after being in the field for six months, had fallen victim to this mentality as was indicated when she was stopped by airport security after her cell phone which she was wearing on her waist had set off the alarm. She admitted to herself that “no Muzungu woman would ordinarily wear her cell phone on her waist” (p 467). Perhaps in Muzunguland it is not necessary to display your phone so openly. Displaying a cell phone so visibly in Mimboland allows for three assumptions to be made about a person at any given time. The first is that they are socially adequate, the second, if we accept that only important people receive phone calls (p. 160), they must be important because they could at any moment receive a call which is why their cell phone needs to be that accessible

on their person. The third assumption is that they have someone, a family member, a friend or a lover that they need to have access to. (Displaying phones visibly could also be to show off that you have a particularly stylish or flashy phone. I am reminded of Amanda-Hope who could not SMS her aspiring lover Coerudelion as often as she wanted because she had a "... tiny little phone which it was not very easy to thumb words (p. 371).” It seems that she preferred a tiny stylish phone to a more practical one that she could easily maneuver. She might have wanted to show off her tiny phone, assuming that it was desirable to others).

Throughout the book, I never got the impression that the issue of saving time was even a minimal factor that drove Mimbolanders (and, for some, their lovers abroad in Muzunguland) to purchase and utilize such technologies as the cell phone or the Internet. As earlier mentioned, social status, prestige, conquering poverty and gaining women seem to be the leading reasons that people desired and utilized these technologies and subsequently creative and innovative appropriation has taken place in their uses – the majority of them being ways of luring lovers or maintaining relationships. Despite the introduction of these ICTs in Mimboland it was still not uncommon for people to handwrite letters (although handwriting letters for some I guess could account for inaccessibility). Providence, Britney’s fiancé/husband (she uses those terms interchangeably) after realizing that the cell phone connection was weak, handwrites Britney three letters. Britney responds to his letters by email which implies that he does have access to the Internet but he still handwrote to her. Perhaps he was not interested in saving time by emailing Britney which surely would have been faster (assuming the he knew how to type reasonably well). Maybe he preferred handwriting letters as that may be a more intimate way of communicating for him. There is, then, the example that we see with Lilly Loveless’ landlady Desire and her boyfriend Sexwale. Desire claims to have fallen in love with Sexwale before the introduction of the cell phone and the Internet and when even regular telephones were hard to come by. Their long distance relationship (she being in Mimboland and he in

Muzuguland) was at the mercy of the postal service which was very slow (p. 400) making constant and necessary communication nearly impossible and almost unbearable. The strain on their relationship caused by the struggle to communicate could well have been put to ease had these technologies been available when they fell in love. The speed of communicating that new ICTs offer has indeed proven to be a desirable feature particularly in intimate and familial relationships.

In Mimboland constant communication is vital in keeping relationships strong. Regular cell phone calls and email interactions, above all else, are used to create and sustain relationships between males and females. In a world where (young) women are highly valued among both ‘flying shirts’ (an easily disposable man with no money and no power p.52) and ‘Mbomas’ (a sugar daddy, sweet mama or a foreign male with lots of money p.34) regardless or in spite of marital status, these technologies afford men the opportunity to win these women over. Courting, dating and marriage in Mimboland are all facilitated by cell phones among other material idols and the Internet. It is common place for males to smother their intended mistresses with money and material possessions (such as clothing and perfume and a means to get their hair done which oddly enough makes them desirable to other men) as proof that they will “take good care of” their women. While these technologies help men to lure and keep the women they desire they, at the same time, give these women a chance to upgrade their social statuses as most are poor or struggling and are looking for opportunities to help free themselves from their less desirable lifestyles. (It seems unfortunate that men born into poverty do not seem to have any one to go to that will give them money or supply them with phones and other material wants. I guess cell phones will keep a constant flow of tension between the ‘flying shirts’ and ‘Mbomas’; the haves vs. the have-nots; those who can provide for their women vs. those who cannot).

Men provide both themselves and the women they are interested in with cell phones. Women usually go for the latest and most

expensive phones and they normally get them from men who also supply them with airtime (p 158-59). This, in Mimboland, is part of what you could call a fair trade between men and women. Men supply the material wants for the women they desire and in return the woman enters into a (sexual) relationship with the man. It is actually very easy for a woman to get a phone from a man who desires her. He will do anything and believe anything she says and aim to provide. In Mimboland, providing a woman of interest with a cell phone seems to all but guarantee the start of a relationship as they are very valuable items. Cell phones are also tricky in that despite their high value, they are very vulnerable. A woman can use its own vulnerability against itself when trying to gain a new cell phone from a boyfriend or husband. This we see clearly presented in the case with Britney, her friend Vicky and their suitor Lovejoy. Neither Britney nor Vicky was interested in Lovejoy but Vicky saw him as an opportunity to get money and a new cell phone. Britney, in on the plan, was to tell Lovejoy that “Vicky dropped her phone in water or in a pit latrine, or had to get a new one because the old one stopped working” (p. 345) none of which was true but all of which are quite possible and very believable scenarios under which a person would need to purchase a new phone. During that same plan, Britney ironically had an accident with her phone and simply asked Lovejoy to replace it. He bought her a new phone as a Christmas present (p. 345). It appeared so easy for them just as it must be for other women. It all seems quite simple at the start of a relationship but the longer a couple stays together things tend to change for better or worse in part or whole by the same objects that helped bring them together.

After much research, Lilly Loveless noted in her field notes that “... with the advent of technologies such as the Internet, Skype and webcams, intimacy can reinvent itself beyond the original confines of physical proximity such that you don’t have to be together in the same space to drink, eat and make love together. These technologies invite people to manipulate time and space in ways that interconnect the real and the virtual and suggest new forms of relationships (p.

420).” Her careful noting of this is very evident throughout the book and several examples explicitly represent this finding. One example we can refer to is Mrs. Wiseman Lovemore and her lover’s unwillingness to let distance ruin their daily morning coffee. She explained, while being interviewed that “we make the cell phone our coffee. We SMS and call to synchronize the making of coffee, then sit and chat as we sip (p. 240).” Having coffee together every morning is obviously a ritual that they prize. It was something they did when they were physically together and they have very cleverly found a way to keep this ritual a standing practice while they are apart.

Another explicit example of Lilly’s findings was presented in one of the stories that Britney told to Lilly. Britney spoke of a husband and wife who were separated by distance but spoke to each other every day via Skype. One day while chatting with his wife the husband admitted that he was sexually aroused. Unbelievable though it may seem he was instructed to solicit a prostitute by his wife. Upon meeting the prostitute in his home he proceeded to talk sexually to his wife via Skype while physically sleeping with the prostitute. He looked at his wife during the encounter. Though it was the prostitute who satisfied him, it was his wife who turned him on. He claimed that he was a “visual man and liked to look at who he’s making love to (p. 203-04).” The fact that his wife suggested the prostitute and was willing to participate in lovemaking in this way was amazing and I guess something that she was used to (I wonder if it was common place) and shows the extent to which she was willing to go in order to preserve their marriage. Perhaps this way he would not “cheat” on her or get a sudden case of the Mboma disease. This couple in addition to Mrs. Wiseman Lovemore and her lover have used the cell phone and the Internet to maintain relationships that were threatened by distance. These ICTs have been used to build a bridge long enough to allow them to live with and love each other as if distance was not an obstacle.

Even when couples or lovers are not necessarily separated by long distances they can conquer any distance they may suffer via their cell phones luring their lovers, if possible, to meet them at any time.

And cell phones allow lovers to express their most intimate sexual desires anywhere and anytime regardless of place or space. We see an example of this when a married couple's celebration of the husband's birthday was interrupted by an SMS sent to the husband from his girlfriend stating that she was oiled up, wearing his favorite thong and wanted to give him the time of his life (p. 77). I assume that this tempting invitation was made by his girlfriend particularly because it was his birthday. However, whether the girlfriend knew that he was in a public restaurant, and with his wife no less, is anyone's guess. The point is that she was able to send this secret and seductive message to him who as far as she was concerned was someplace where she was not. Unfortunately for them, the wife intercepted the message but in past instances she might not have. The cell phone is a perfect device for coordinating meetings with mbomese and mbomas. Everyone knows that girls go after married men and women know that their husbands are likely to develop Mbomas disease.

I am reminded of another example that was revealed in one of Britney's tales to Lilly Loveless. She spoke of a young married woman whose husband publicly went out with other women. To replace what she was missing in the relationship and I suppose as a way of secretly getting back at her husband she turned to prostitution. She used her cell phone to make herself accessible to clients (p. 184). In Africa, where divorce is frowned upon, adultery is the only way to save marriages (p. 112). This explains why the young woman (and many other women represented in the book) did not leave her husband. Undoubtedly unsatisfied and angry with her husband, she turned to prostitution which was made increasingly possible by her ownership of a cell phone where clients could contact her at any place or time and where her details could be passed between men instantly. Perhaps prostitution was her only means of finding sex, perhaps love and relieving loneliness.

Loneliness can also be easily avoided by the Internet. The Internet, not just appropriate for sending emails to family, friends and loved ones and updating oneself on developments around the

world, is also convenient for viewing and sharing pornography, posting pictures of oneself in attempt to gain lovers or dancing suggestively in front of a webcam to entice lovers, finding details about interested partners and even participating in cybersex. Britney tells Lilly Loveless stories of women who spend hours searching for men's details. They search for men of prestige and then concoct these long emails with tales of their desire to find their true love and put out their burning flames. Some men reply to these emails and others do not. Both men and women look for love on the Internet. They find that rejection is a lot easier in cyberspace than it would be in face-to-face conversations. Sometimes the Internet is used to flirt, tease and lure others into relationships. The relationship between Amanda-Hope and Coerudelon is an example of a relationship that started over the Internet and was maintained through SMSes but never manifested itself physically at the request of Coerudelon (p 368-78). However, many relationships start off in cyberspace and make their way to the cell phone world and eventually into full blown physical relationships.

Relationships can either be strengthened or destroyed by the right amount of or too little cell phone/Internet interaction. Given that most people have cell phones, they are the dominant source of communication and are expected to be used by both parties equally to maintain relationships. They are expected to guarantee availability all of the time. One weekend when Britney could not get a hold of Lilly Loveless on her cell phone, she was scared and thought that something must be wrong. She even went to Lilly Loveless' house to see if she was ok, something that most people can relate to. Relieved the following week that Lilly Loveless was alright, she was annoyed with Lilly's temporary unavailability and in a dream she had even confessed that she felt abandoned (p. 303). Having a cell phone meant that if nothing else you can and should be available for immediate contact at any given time. In the few cases represented in the book where a cell phone was absent, email, handwritten letters or teleboutiques were used in the same respect. Neglecting to call a lover or a wife causes great suspicion in this crazy world of

relationships where everyone is cheating on their partners while expecting their partners to be faithful to them.

I remember when Lilly Loveless interviewed Mrs. Wiseman Lovemore. At one point a call to her cell phone interrupts the interview which Mrs. Wiseman Lovemore accepts because she “can’t ignore” (p. 235) it. According to Lilly Loveless, who judging by her excitement and body language, Mrs. Wiseman Lovemore was talking to a lover. Still, however, the mere statement by Mrs. Wiseman Lovemore that she could not ignore that phone call suggests that there are some calls that she can and does ignore. Reading ahead we come to a point where Britney, while talking to Lilly Loveless receives a call from Lovejoy, a man that I mentioned earlier who has been pursuing her for a long time and that she described as untrustworthy. Britney “... identified the number of the caller with a sigh, and ignored the call”. When Lovejoy called a second time, Britney ignored the call and turned off her phone (p. 342). Quite simply, if you want to speak to someone you accept the call if you do not, you ignore it. Cell phones and the Internet are powerful in their ability to state the unsaid; allowing you to speak without speaking.

Mr. Sims, another character presented to Lilly Loveless through one of Britney’s interviews was a married man who seemed to work from home or to be unemployed while his wife worked during the day. Mr. Sims’ maid was very flirtatious and tempted him often. Despite having slept with her after a few days (an act that obviously led the maid to think that they had entered into a relationship) Mr. Sims decides to take pictures of his naked maid with a digital camera which he then sent to his wife via email (another clever way of using the Internet although I am unhappy with Mr. Sims and would otherwise not like to complement any of his actions) and suggests that they get a new maid. Though they sent the maid away, the maid continued to call and flash (or beep) but to no avail. She questioned: “What type of lover are you who doesn’t call? I flash you and get no response. And even when I buy airtime for my cell phone and call, you don’t answer (p. 202-03).” Lovers are supposed to call each other. He had a working cell phone and they had slept together.

Those two facts, for the maid, meant that they were lovers and that he should be available to her when she called him (although the very fact that she was sent away on his behalf should have alerted her to the end of their “relationship”). Being unavailable during a time when cell phones and or emails are supposed to render you completely available can alert an unsuspecting (though they must always expect to suspect) spouse or lover to an affair. Not having time for them must mean that your time is being spent with someone. Otherwise monogamous couples then turn to polygamy to replace what they feel is lacking in their relationships.

Though the majority of the uses of ICTs in this book are geared to creating and sustaining relationships there are a few examples of innovative appropriation of the cell phone and the Internet. One example is presented when Britney shares with Lilly Loveless that she scanned all of her certificates at a cybercafé and stored them away on Gmail for safe keeping. This she did after hearing of a woman whose certificates were burned by her jealous and angry husband (p. 169). Even Lilly Loveless was pleasantly surprised at Britney’s appropriation of the Internet. Perhaps in Muzunguland safety keeping measures of that sort are rarely done or they are so commonplace that Lilly Loveless takes it for granted and was surprised to hear of a Mimbolander who had taken care to secure her certificates in that way.

We also hear of Bobinga Iroko and his colleagues at *The Talking Drum* who wanted to introduce affordable blogging technologies that would “give a solid online presence to powerful Mimboland voices... through personal blogs that could easily be updated even from Mimboland even where connectivity is weak...” The new blogging technologies would be easy to initiate, Bobinga Iroko suspected, because “one does not need more than basic computer skills (p. 147). This new blogging technology would provide an avenue for people to voice their opinions and share them with anyone who could access the Internet.

Another creative use of these ICTs by Bobinga Iroko was his social media revolution in the face of the strike and the arrests of Dr.

Wiseman Lovemore and his colleagues. During this time, Bobinga Iroko and his fellow journalists from *The Talking Drum* sent out emails, SMSes, faxes and letters in the hopes of getting the attention of the diplomatic community and introducing all the wrong that had been done (p. 384). Unfortunately, at least at the time Lilly Loveless had completed her field work, the strike was still going strong and Dr. Wiseman Lovemore was still in prison. Still it was a useful way to get the information out and gain the responses that he might need to free his comrade. I give these examples to show Mimbolander ways of appropriating these technologies outside of the need to secure relationships.

As has been presented throughout my reflections on the appropriation of ICTs in Mimboland, the main uses of these technologies centered on engaging with potential lovers and maintaining 'healthy' relationships with one or several committed lovers. In as much as new ICTs provide alternatives for communication, sex and love within (long distance) relationships among Mimbolanders, I cannot discount the need for physical accessibility to another. While such ICTs, in some cases, help to make long distance relationships easier for both parties particularly regarding sex, they do not provide love as love can so easily be side stepped for sex. These ICTs in their ability to SMS, email, send (nude or explicit) pictures, stream porn and create opportunities to engage in cybersex provide what some might call the solution to marital problems while at the same time they could be the very cause of these problems. Perhaps if these technologies were not appropriated in this way and lovers could not so easily find replacements to supplement what their partners' lack, they would be forced to at least try to work things out. To use Britney's phrase, these ICTs are "like the bait fisherman use to lure fish to their hooks" (p. 440). However, for the people of Mimboland who are trying desperately to get out of poverty, find acceptance, feel young, access sex and find love these ICTs are highly necessary. They offer a sort of perfect balance between men and women at first even though eventually things tend to lean this way or that. In a world where it is commonplace for men

and women to use each other for sex, love and material things, these ICTs are being used the best and only way they know how and that is to continue to beat the other person at their own game.

Telephones, Cell Phones and Vulnerability in a Woman's World⁵

Through the experience of Immaculate, a Mimbo teenager who moves to Botswana with the hopes of “doing business” (p. 1), we are introduced to a world of refugees seeking solace in Botswana and the xenophobic hostility that had become a part of their lives. As many of the female refugees found employment in housekeeping, we explore a world full of maids and madams. Where one might be compelled to think of a refugee maid as meek and submissive, we learn that in fact, maids can be both victims and perpetrators. Madams, some of whom are guilty of treating their maids badly or being too frugal with pay, live in constant fear of their maids’ (phone) abuse, wrath or vengeance (and potential ‘naughtiness’ – going after their man although as researcher Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny discovered, many madams could not even conceive of their husbands cheating on them with their maids). Men, seemingly completely dependent on the presence and care of a woman, are ever tested in their faith and devotion toward their wives as maids work their way into the family and (sometimes deliberately) into his heart. For many of the maids in this book, survival, in addition to securing a job, meant networking with fellow refugees and being in constant communication with family members left at home in addition to boyfriends and friends who were locally present. ICT use, though scarce in the stories presented, represented one of the primary ways that maids took advantage of their madams.

Compared to the use of ICTs among the characters of *Married But Available* (Nyamnjoh 2009, see also chapter 4 in this book), there is very little appropriation of the cell phone or the Internet in *Intimate*

⁵ This chapter outlines the various appropriations of ICTs among the characters of Francis Nyamnjoh’s (2010) *Intimate Strangers*

Strangers (2010). The primary source of communication in the book was the telephones as opposed to cell phones and as I will address later there were only two instances of deliberate Internet usage (or desire to use). The primary duties of maids render them immobile. They work in the homes of their employers. They are to be at the disposal of their employers at any time of the day making them not only a slave to the demands of their madams but to the location of the telephone in the home for which some demands and requests are transmitted. It was, however, quite interesting to read about the life and experiences of maids and their employers. Growing up in a culture where maids are owned only by rich or famous people, I tend to take them for granted. I never understood why I or anyone should want to pay someone to do what I am capable of doing myself. In fact, I got into a mild argument with my good friend when I started reading the book as she defended her family's use of a maid where I thought using maids was ultimately attributed to laziness.

Apart from the many sweeping generalizations, I was also disgusted with the things that maids were being used for. I did not understand why someone would employ another to clean the house, dishes, or laundry. My good friend pointed out that I come from a world (I grew up in Brooklyn, New York) where people own washing machines and dryers, dishwashers and so on and are not required to put the same time and effort into daily chores. Growing up, we were lucky enough to have a washing machine but that was it. Everything else had to be cleaned or washed manually in addition to maintaining a clean home and bedroom. After reading the book and realizing that most of the women who employed maids were mothers who had full-time jobs, I could see how it was seemingly impossible to maintain daily chores on their own. I also do not have children but I know several single mothers and I can appreciate why any mother (single or married) would access a maid to help her where children are concerned. Even Mrs. Sebes Sebeso, an employer interviewed by Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny, suggested that maids were "wasteful" but "if you have children you need to have them (p. 235)". Though she diminishes the value of maids as people by calling them wasteful, she

acknowledges their necessity where family is concerned. The entire book does well to portray maids as a useful part of everyday life where one is unable to live decently otherwise.

In Chapter One, I was excited to read about Immaculate's own introduction to cell phones as the reader is with her when she is abandoned at the Sir Seretse Khama International Airport but was lucky enough to meet an official who offered his cell phone. It was "... the first time ever [she] was seeing or using a cell phone to make a call" (p. 1). Beyond just knowing that it was her first time seeing and using a cell phone, I wondered about the experience beyond what was offered in the book. I wondered how it felt for her to dial the person's number on the keypad. Was it very different from dialing a number on a telephone? Like Amanda-Hope in *Married But Available*, did she find that it was a "tiny little phone" (2009: 371) making it hard or uncomfortable to dial the number? (The year was 1997 so phones were still likely to be big or 'brick'-like. I guess it could not have been too small). Did the phone fit comfortably in her hand? Was it heavier or lighter than she expected it to be? (Did she have any expectations at all?) Did she hold it appropriately to her face? Could she hear properly (was the signal clear enough/volume high enough)? Did she know how to end the call when she was finished? Over all, I wondered if she liked the experience although being abandoned at the airport in a foreign place in addition to being sorely under-dressed for the Botswana winter (p. 1) would render any pleasant experience unpleasant. Still, I wondered.

After reading Immaculate's first experience, I expected that I would find similar experiences as I read further but instead I was immersed into the world of the female refugees and local maids and their experiences of working for people who both love and hate them. Given the details of the book, it might be easier to talk about the creative appropriation of vulnerability at the hands of (mostly Zimbabwean according to the book) maids. The book explicitly states "for Zimbabwean maids "... their power comes from their awareness of their vulnerability. Just when you learn to trust them, they clean you out (p. 212)." One of the sweeping generalizations

that I was so uncomfortable with was that Zimbabwean maids are hard workers but they steal (see pages 37, 46, 74-6, 108, 147-8, 212 and 277 for example). One of the hypotheses that Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny, a researcher who employs Immaculate as her research assistant, wanted to address was: “that where they are underpaid, maids will tend to snatch and make up for what they are really worth in their own eyes. And where they are treated well and given incentives, they tend to calculate that to snatch something is not in their interests... (p. 101)” Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny is trying to present maids (although too generally) as persons with agency who watch, learn and calculate, knowing if and when to steal, how much and for how long.

In *Case 10* (p. 280) of the series of interviews that Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny dictated after speaking with a group of 18-25 year old women who were staying with a family in Gaborone (p. 275), a 34 year old woman stated that she thought “maids are strangers best avoided (p 280).” Soon after, during her research, Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny interviewed Dr. Daisy Zambezi Moyo who has both worked as a maid and has employed maids. Dr. Moyo stated that in reality some “... employers live in fear of maids who hide behind perceived or assumed powerlessness but are capable of hurting employers (p. 293).” This, I thought summarized the best explanation as to why the woman in *Case 10* in addition to other employers in the book suggested that maids should be avoided. After reading this book, I would agree that, based on the experiences of maids and madams in the stories told to Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny, some maids do use their refugee status to warrant pity from their employers while at the same time using their refugee status to take advantage of and abuse their employers.

As far as maids abusing their employers, I think this would be a good place to start talking about the appropriation of ICTs among the characters in *Intimate Strangers*. Several of the employers interviewed by Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny spoke of their maids abusing the phone. In all of the instances it was the telephone that was abused. The cell phone did not seem to be widely used at the

time of the research possibly because she was dealing with a group of people for whom basic survival was not guaranteed and cell phones, as items of luxury, could not be accessed. Some of the maids did use their employers' telephone to call cell phones which was very expensive at the time but none of the maids owned their own cell phones and neither did their employers (at least none that were indicated). Of course, it is not very likely that a maid would have access to their employer's cell phone so I guess instances of abuse in that respect were highly unlikely. Even the abuse of local phone calls was expensive as one interviewee, Miss Candlestick, pointed out. She, living in Botswana, had a Zimbabwean maid that made P400 worth of local calls. Growing up in Canada where local calls were free of charge, it was upsetting to her that not only was her maid abusing her phone but it was costing a lot of money. She stated that "once [a maid] use[s] the phone [one time] they will want to use it 10 times (p. 124)."

Another Zimbabwean maid that was employed by Mrs. Esther Kasongo also made frequent calls to Zimbabwe. When Mrs. Kasongo confronted her maid she claimed that she did not make the calls and that she did not even know how to use the phone. She further stated that her people lived in a village and therefore did not have access to a phone so she could not call them (p. 82-3). The truth was the maid was in fact responsible for making those calls. This maid attempted take advantage of her vulnerability and her assumed powerlessness. She feigned ignorance when it came to admitting that she knew how to use the phone and then used her identity as a refugee fleeing from undesirable living conditions to claim that her family was living in a place where phones were not even available. From this example we see how some of the maids abused their employers.

The maids in the book used telephones for several reasons. (Because many of the more negative attitudes concerning maids were associated with Zimbabweans, I will present most of the abuse as having been done by Zimbabweans even though Botswana maids were not wholly innocent in these matters.) Zimbabweans, first of all,

liked to talk in between working. They like “talking on the phones, they just love talking to a cell phone or mate across if they can (p. 185).” Dr. Gladys Nana, a Ghanaian lecturer who was working at DUST at the time, made this statement. She complained that her maid was making frequent calls to her sister in Zimbabwe which made the phone bill very expensive. Where Dr. Gladys Nana once left her phone out so that the maid could call her in case of an emergency, she was forced to lock her phone up lest the maid be tempted to continue abusing it (p. 185).

Other maids used their employers’ telephones to invite visitors to the home. Another interviewee, Mrs. Marabelle Wangui, said her maid Mochudi used her phone to call her boyfriends and have them visit her in her house (p. 64). The maid was wrong on two accounts: she was not supposed to use the phone (phones are there for the maids to receive calls, particularly from their employers, not to make calls) and she was not supposed to have visitors during working hours. Many of the maids in the book did not like to live with their employers for fear that working hours would be infinite. Others however lived with their employers in the Servants Quarters or bedrooms that had been allocated for the maid. Several employers expressed that their maids should only have visitors after hours or on weekends and that they were to stay with the maid in the Servants Quarters. Several maids liked to have their boyfriend(s) over and they would do nothing except watch television all day.

Sometimes when maids were caught abusing their employers phone they would offer to work free of charge until their debt was paid. Some of them succeeded in paying off their debt while some employers did not insist that their maids pay them back financially (they instead, locked their phones away taking away all phone privileges). In other instances as was the case with Mrs. Happy Karabogo’s maid Phikwe, the maid was dismissed after abusing the phone (p. 253). In the case where the maid was to work to pay off her debt, it did not always work out because maids could flee whenever they wanted to especially because they did not have papers and they could not be traced once they fled their employers home.

Cell Phones, in this book, were used to call, send messages and provide as well as prevent access to certain individuals. When Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny came back to Botswana after completing her research and staying away for four years and six months, she called Immaculate from her cell phone for a much-needed reunion and to generously share her proceeds from her book (p. 305) which could not have been written without the help of Immaculate. Immaculate also had a cell phone. Immaculate did not appear to have a cell phone during Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny's research and I wondered how she got a hold of her number. Perhaps she and Immaculate maintained communication via email during the time that she was away.

When they met and began talking, Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny learned that Immaculate was no longer with Noway, the guy she was dating at the time of her research. She also learned that she was currently having trouble with her new boyfriend. She was soon to learn about the power that this man had over Immaculate. They found a quiet place where they could talk. Before Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny and Immaculate started their conversation, Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny turned off her cell phone and instructed Immaculate to do the same (p. 306). Through this action Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny was acknowledging that cell phones keep one at the mercy of any one of their contacts at any given time and that her phone could potentially start ringing or alert to her that an SMS had been received during what she considered an important conversation. She wanted to minimize potential interruptions. Turning of their phones meant that for the moment they were inaccessible. They had rendered their cell phones powerless. As is the case when one is in church or the library or in a movie theater, the cell phone becomes inappropriate. I noticed how often Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny was interrupted by telephone calls to the employers that she was interviewing during her research. Unfortunately, telephones are not as practical to unplug or 'turn off' as cell phones. Even where the interview might have been taking place in one room, a ringing telephone can be heard

throughout the house so the interview would still have been interrupted.

Immaculate was able to talk freely about her ex-boyfriend Noway and her new stalker Phillip. Before she and Phillip started 'dating' he used to approach her often and claim that he "wanted a blanket". After Phillip requested a blanket several times Immaculate used her cell phone to SMS her friend asking: "What is meant in Botswana when a man says I want a blanket?" She learned that it meant he wanted to sleep with her (p. 316-17). Where she was once ignorant to his request, her cell phone allowed her to become instantly knowledgeable as it provided her with an avenue for which she could question someone on the matter and quickly receive an answer. After finding out what he was really after, Immaculate persistently refused to sleep with Phillip. After a while, however, she changed. She began SMSing him asking him to come over, apologizing for her former refusals to sleep with him and begging him to sleep with her (p. 318). She sent him several SMSes through-out the day. Unfortunately, she realized that the reason she had begun changing and gaining feelings for him was because he was using some sort of traditional medicine. She could not escape him. When she tried to get away from him or attempt to look at another man he would verbally abuse her through SMS messaging.

She admitted to Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny: "I still have the message on my cell phone, and it still gives me goose pimples when I read it. I store every SMS he sends me." I wondered why she would choose to keep the messages. SMSes can be deleted just as fast as they are received. I thought it was perhaps because she was under the influence of the muti (or whatever Phillip was using to control her) that she physically could not delete the messages. Still, just because she stored the messages does not mean that she had to read them over and over again especially if they scared her so much that they gave her "goose pimples".

She further stated: "I value my cell phone. I appreciate it, I love it, and I want to have it nearby at all times. I don't want to stay for one hour away from my phone..." This is exactly how I felt about

my first cell phone before it was stolen so I completely understand what she means. She cherished her phone so much and was somehow not put off by it despite the fact that it held her prisoner to Phillip. She continued: "My phone is my greatest companion, but it is also my greatest terror." This is such a powerful statement. It was also very similar with me. My phone was like my best friend but it could easily make me feel insignificant although I admit that feeling insignificant and being terrorized are very different things. "The pain, the bad words, they come through my cell phone. When [Phillip] feels like saying something and he can't face me, he will say it through the cell phone." That, of course, is one of the beautiful things about cell phones. They can eliminate face-to-face interactions when desired. It was similar to the time when Noway was stalking Immaculate. She mentioned that at one point the Police called Noway to warn him to leave her alone (p. 312). The lack of face-to-face interaction leaves a lot to the imagination. Perhaps if some scrawny short Police officer came to Noway and told him to leave her alone he would not have listened because physically the Police officer did not seem to be a threat to him. Receiving a warning from a Police officer over the phone could be more threatening than face-to-face. If he had no idea what the Police officer looked like, he might have visualized a tall or muscular officer and may have been scared enough to leave her alone.

Finally she says: "It has made me experience too much abuse. Without my cell phone, I think I would have suffered less. All the messages, all those things he has been telling me, they are in that place, in that phone (p. 320)." For me it was the opposite. I did not have any messages to store. My phone, for the most part, was SMSless and *that* terrorized me. I was being stood up and neglected by people who I considered friends. My SMSless phone made me feel unimportant and I often felt lonely and miserable. What is the point of having a cell phone when no one wants to call you or send you messages, I felt. That is after all why we so readily choose to use cell phones is it not? They allow you to contact people and be contacted anywhere at any time. This was why Immaculate was so confused

when she gave Phillip her number and he disappeared and did not phone her for two weeks (p. 315-16). In her mind, he had her number so why was he not using it. In *Married But Available*, Nyamnjoh (2009:162) suggests that when girls in Mimboland give guys their number, they are giving guys access to themselves. They use cell phones to grab and to be grabbed. Immaculate had made herself accessible to Phillip and it took two weeks before he made use of that accessibility.

In other use of the telephone, we read that Marvelous Faith identified maids for the Maids program at God's Tear by passing messages over the phone and radio and by word of mouth (2010:165). I assumed that she meant passing messages via telephone but cell phones may have been used where available. This was a good way for her and the other workers of God's Tear to advertise and gain maids for participation. Another interesting use of the telephone was when Angel had a virtual prayer meeting with her pastor over the phone. During her interview with Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny, Angel was phoned by her pastor and went into her room, where her Bible was already waiting, to have a "private prayer call". The prayer meeting lasted 30 minutes (p. 200). That her Bible was waiting and ready for her implied that this was perhaps a daily or a weekly occurrence. However, the fact that the phone call interrupted the interview made me think that unless Angel lost track of time, the pastor called at random and this may not have been a normal occurrence. Using the telephone in this way, Angel and her pastor did not let distance (or lack of church building) ruin their (desire to have a) prayer meeting.

Use of the Internet was very minimal among the characters of the book. The book focused on maids and their relationship with their employers. Perhaps if Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny had taken a little more interest in the employers regarding the full-time jobs that led to the necessity of a maid, we might have seen more use of the Internet in the day-to-day job responsibilities. But, that was not the focus of her research. As I have suggested earlier, the maids, barely able to provide their own food, probably did not own cell phones and were

only able to abuse the use of their employers' telephones. If any of the employers represented in the book had computers in their homes, the maids did not have access to them and if they did, we did not read about their uses or abuses of it.

When Immaculate was finally hired to work for Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny as a research assistant, she was instructed to transcribe the interviews and to send them as electronic documents. For this Immaculate was going to need additional money to gain access to a desktop computer and Internet access (p. 41). This experience greatly benefited Immaculate as she gained information through Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny's research and it also gave her a chance to earn decent money. Additionally, it allowed her to practice the computer skills that she learned in the computer course that she took which included, among other software applications, word-processing, excel and PowerPoint (p. 24). If Immaculate had never seen nor used a cell phone before coming to Botswana, I doubt that she had much Internet access. I wonder if emailing the transcribed interviews to Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny was some of the first emailing that she had ever done. It would be nice to know what she came up with as her email address.

We read of another young woman that was interviewed among the 18-25 year old women who liked to write poetry. This eighteen-year-old woman lived with her sister and brother-in-law who gave her P200 a month. She saved most of her pocket money "... because she wants to buy a laptop in which she can save her poems and share them with the wider public someday (p. 276-77)." After storing her poems on her laptop, she could post them on Facebook, for example, as a way of inviting the wider public to read them. This, although I do not know if she succeeded in buying a laptop, was a nice appropriation of the Internet; as a way of making her poetry known and perhaps being discovered which would lead to even greater opportunities.

As has been presented throughout my reflections on the use of information and communication technologies among the characters of *Intimate Strangers*, the telephone was most readily used by maids to

maintain contact with family members at home and to chat with local friends in addition to inviting boyfriends over to their employers' houses. While this may have been a survival tactic for the maids so that they could enjoy themselves while living in an otherwise unpleasant situation away from home, it was, in some instances abused. Maids used the telephones without care for the cost of the phone calls and without regard to the fact they were not supposed to use them at all except to receive calls or in the case of an emergency. We do not know how often they used the telephone at home before they came to Botswana (those who had access to a phone) but we can probably assume that they would not and could not use the phone as much as they did while living with their employers. More than wanting to stay in touch, this was conscious abuse by the maids. For some, telephone abuse, stealing and flirting with the husband were calculated ways of getting back at an employer who treated them badly.

Cell phones helped provide information where it was lacking. They both provided and prevented access to and from certain individuals when either option was desired. They also served as a means of keeping one prisoner (as was the case with Immaculate and the menacing SMSes that she received and stored from Phillip). There was minimal use of them and one could not determine if they were in fact objects of desire. Maybe they were too much to hope for and so it was not the first thing someone bought when they got money. Also, the maids did not make that much. Even if they saved enough to buy a cell phone, it might prove too hard for them to maintain airtime. A computer was used by Immaculate to store Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny's interviews so that they could be emailed when they were completed. Quite possibly, she and Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny had used the Internet to maintain communication after she left the field. Finally, one of the interviewees hoped to use her laptop computer to one day share her poetry with the world.

Where creative appropriation took place, more so than with the appropriation of ICTs, was in the way the maids used their vulnerability to gain power over their employees. As refugees the

maids were expected to be desperate and powerless. Employers saw them as a means of cheap labor and sometimes took advantage of them. Some of the maids, however, used that same perception to take advantage of their employers. They were agents as Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny had suggested. They were creatures of calculation who knew how to make good out of a bad situation.

Drinks, Bottle Caps and Mobile Phones⁶

Dieudonne, an elderly “houseboy” from Warzone living in the Swine Quarter, is an emotionally unstable character who finds freedom and acceptance in addition to a temporary deliverance from life’s problems through alcohol. Though his excessive drinking had resulted in unexplained bruises, uncontrollable urination, lost nights, late mornings, lost jobs and eventually the loss of his beloved wife Tsanga, Dieudonne, like other inhabitants of the Swine Quarter, has grown increasingly dependent on alcohol (Nyamnjoh 2008). Different from the Mimbolandians whom we met through Lilly Loveless’ experience as a PhD student researching the concepts of sex, power and consumption in Mimboland, ICTs, particularly the mobile phone, were highly regarded and used frequently in everyday life, particularly in the everyday making and breaking of relationships (Nyamnjoh 2009) yet similar to the Zimbabwean and Batswana maids living in Botswana whom we met through the Madams of Dr. Winter-Bottom Nanny’s research on maids and madams in Botswana where ICTs held no (significant) place, (Nyamnjoh 2010), mobile phones for Dieudonne and his friends were valued but, for the most part, unattainable luxuries and had little impact in their everyday lives. It was alcohol, a much more accessible luxury that governed the social lives of the Swine Quartets and came to be appropriated in various ways in their day-to-day living.

Among the characters of *The Travail of Dieudonne* the mobile phone is indeed an object of extreme desire. Dieudonne tells us that everyone is desperate for a mobile phone, “from thieves to pit latrines (p. 104).” In the Swine Quarter we see how those fortunate enough to own mobile phones are both despised and admired.

⁶ This chapter outlines the various appropriations of ICTs among the characters of Francis Nyamnjoh’s (2008) *The Travail of Dieudonne*.

Chopngomna, one of Dieudonne's friends from the Grand Canari Bar, was both admired by women and despised by men. One of the reasons for this was because he owned two mobile phones "the latest, cutest and the most expensive Nokia and Samsung in town; phones endowed with the fanciest ringtones that made him a popular spectacle ..." (p. 44-5). He, like Dieudonne had suggested to Dieumerici, was like the average black man who "displayed his wealth on the tip of his nose (p. 91)." His mobile phones were visual markers of a success that was all too rare within the community.

Though not everyone could afford their own mobile phones some uses of them in tight social networks requires ownership of such mobile technology by at most one person. The concept of uBuntu is best understood by the phrase: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person by or through other people or I am because you are) (Cornell *et al* 2009:5). Cornell *et al.* (2009) tells us that human beings can achieve personhood only through other individuals. The necessity of persons to validate personhood for other persons creates a cycle of obligation that we are all born into, to ensure our own personhood as well as those around us. Personhood, as a means of receiving and giving respect to others and acknowledging that one is worthy of living and being in the world can be achieved through acts of kindness. Such acts of kindness among certain marginalized people, people living in the Swine Quarters for example, would include the sharing of the mobile phone with those who do not have their own access. Nyamnjoh (2004:53) tells us that Africa's cultural values of sociality, interconnectedness and conviviality make accessing such technologies possible without being personally connected. In West Africa, he states, most mobile phone users tend to serve as communication nodes for their community letting others pay or freely use their phone to make calls to relatives, friends and other contacts. It is not unusual for "a single individual to be connected for whole groups and communities to benefit". This does not seem to be the case in the Swine Quarters. Regarding mobile phones, the attitude might better be described as every man for himself. It did not seem that multiple people could benefit from one

individual's ownership. Alcohol on the other hand, which I draw on later in the paper, is a luxury where multiple individuals can benefit from a single person's (or beer company's) generosity in providing alcohol to others.

While the book portrays the mobile phone as an object of desire, the few incidents where the mobile phone was present introduce some of the more negative aspects of the mobile phone. We read that at one point while Dieudonne was telling his life story to Dieumerici and other bar goers Chopngomna was "lying about his whereabouts into one of his mobile phones (Nyamnjoh 2008:104)." Because mobile phones are mobile one can be anywhere when making or receiving a call. This flexible mobility offered by the mobile phone has in some instances been looked at negatively. Accelerated mobility, it has been suggested, can make it easier for mobile phone users to lie about their whereabouts (Brinkman *et al* 2009:78, Horst & Miller 2006:98), for example, when communicating with this technology as Chopngomna was doing. Had Chopngomna been phoned on a landline, a fixed-line phone at the bar for example, there would be no way for him to claim that he was anywhere but where location of the landline placed him. His ability to lie about his whereabouts through his mobile phone can provide him with an opportunity to be in a place where he does not belong or that the caller may not want him to be or offer a false expectation of his arrival to another place as he may claim to be closer to the address than he actually is.

In another incident, it was said that Precious, a singer and Dieumerici's then girlfriend, another mobile phone owner, was getting unwanted attention from the "high and mighty" that had begun having "wild fantasies" about her. Apparently they contacted her so much that she could no longer answer her mobile phone all the time. She sometimes resorted to changing her number when necessary just to avoid their calls (Nyamnjoh 2008:160). The increased accessibility offered by the mobile phone has also, in instances, been looked at negatively (although it has also been looked at as an attractive feature of the mobile phone). The accessibility offered by the mobile phone

knows no boundaries. Individuals can be contacted at all time's day or night so the breaching of privacy is increasingly likely (Brinkman *et al* 2009:77). In Precious's case the "high and mighty" men frequently called her about inappropriate or unwanted fantasies but they may very well have called her several times a day, at times that Precious may have considered disrespectfully early in the morning or too late at night. She could only avoid their calls by ignoring her mobile phone or changing her number. She refused to let the expectations of infinite accessibility presented by the mobile phone subject her to the verbal desires of those men.

She, unlike Immaculate in *Intimate Strangers* (Nyamnjoh 2010), was able to avoid suffering. At the incessant calling of her 'boyfriend' Phillip, Immaculate admitted that "it [her mobile phone] has made me experience too much abuse. Without my cell phone, I think I would have suffered less. All the messages, all those things he has been telling me, they are in that place, in that phone (p. 320)." Though Precious was no doubt inconvenienced by having to change her number she was able to avoid those men at least when they want to communicate their fantasies via the mobile phone. She was an owner of a mobile phone but, as she has shown, she was not a slave to it. Immaculate clearly adored her phone but it was still not quite clear why she was not able to avoid "suffering" the way Precious did. Immaculate was repeatedly offended by Phillip's messages as she not only kept them but read them over and over again. I can understand not wanting to change her number but I was confused as to why she did not delete the offending messages. SMSes can be deleted just as fast as they are received. Immaculate seemed to be a slave to her mobile phone. Acknowledging that she was under the influence of whatever muti Phillip was using on her which may have prohibited her from ignoring his calls or deleting his messages, unless she secretly enjoyed the type of attention that she was receiving from Phillip, she was an unfortunate slave to her ownership and the ideal of the mobile phone. Perhaps she did not want to trouble her relationship with it so she would not change her number or more importantly she would not want to disrupt the connection that she

had with other friends by forcing them to get used to her new number. Perhaps she felt that having a mobile phone meant that she had to be accessible at all times even when she was being bullied and threatened. She was trapped between the burdens laid upon her by the expectations of the mobile phone and the torment she suffered at the hands of Phillip. Precious refused to be in such a predicament.

Later in the book we read that Madame Gazellia Mamelle, “termite queen of the Grand Canari” bar is “rumored to lure young men with enticements of cash, cars, and mobile phones ...” So successful was she at luring young men with the above luxuries, she persuaded a young male journalist to write and publish good things about the Swine Quarter album and even got a feature video clip (Nyamnjoh 2008:161). In this example we see that the mobile phone, among other hard to come by luxuries, is used in a transactional way. Madame Gazellia Mamelle uses these items as bait to attract young men that might otherwise not be attracted to her despite her being “sumptuous and amply endowed (*ibid*).” She also used her material worth to get a praise report of the Swine Quarter album published and herself in a video. While using the mobile phone in this way may not necessarily be seen as negative regarding the mobile phone as an object but where social relationships are concerned, it could be seen as damaging. In Nyamnjoh’s (2009) *Married But Available* we are introduced to a world where mobile phones are the dominant tools in a male’s quest to attract females and – assuming that he is successful – ultimately his means of maintaining a sufficient successful relationship with her even regardless of distance. In addition to mobile phones being the facilitators of courting, dating and marriage in offering an opportunity of (assumed) limitless communication they are also, in addition to other material wants, worthy gifts to be given to desired females by men as proof that they can “take good care of (p. 50)” their women.

The underlying statement behind the Mimbo men of *Married But Available* and Madame Gazellia Mamelle’s use of the mobile phone in this way implies that without mobile phones, social relationships, intimate or platonic, are nearly impossible to create or maintain.

While it could be recognized that using mobile phones reciprocally in the offering of friendship, favors or intimacy might help increase and enhance relationships, it might also be noted this can put an unnecessary strain on the relationship as the pressure to maintain the latest mobile phones or to support airtime maintenance can get in the way of two people being genuine friends or lovers. Given that friendships and relationships can and have been formed and maintained without the benefit of mobile phones, take for example the friendships of the characters in this book or real life experiences of friendships and relationships, the assumption that they would be non-existent without the use of or help of mobile phones would be unjustifiable. It just became apparent to me that one could view mobile phones, when used in this transactional way, as necessary for the creation and maintenance of social relationships.

It might be appropriate to say that while mobile phones were highly desired they were such an inaccessible luxury that an expectation for one was guarded with pessimism. The lack of mobile phone ownership or accessibility was so great that there was little room for this technology to adopt much more than its role of mobile communication. In other words, while individuals like Chopngomna were admired for their possession of mobile phones (probably only because of their scarcity), mobile phones in general did not seem to alleviate poverty, offer prestige or upgrade social status to any large extent because if they did, the very uneven scale that balanced the haves and the have not's would render most of the Swine Quartets as less than worthy social human beings in their own community. Instead, alcohol is what brought prestige. The consumption and provision of alcohol was significant. Chopngomna was also popular because he was able to provide or purchase beer for everyone when hanging out in the bar. Through his generous acts he was able to offer people a way of easy and comfortable communication.

While drinking, people could relax and speak freely to one another. They could feel at ease knowing they were in a social space made accessible by the sharing and consumption of alcohol. Alcohol seems to be a crucial element for distinguishing merely sitting

together with people or having a social gathering. “Drink your drink my boy” Dieudonne says to Dieumerci. “My story isn’t going to run away. We are in a social gathering are we not (p. 56)?” Dieumerci did not seem to be much of a drinker. It seemed more like he was drinking because Chopngomna with his bleeding wallet (p. 46, 73) had been generous enough to buy him a Guinness. Not only that, but he was drinking to fit in (or rather he just babied his drink) comfortably into the atmosphere for which he found himself in, even if he would have preferred to be hearing Dieudonne’s story in the privacy of Dieudonne’s shack with no beer and no one else around. I remember being invited to a lounge here in Cape Town. I refused because I felt like I would stand out because I do not smoke or drink. My friend said when she does not want to drink she orders an Appetizer because it looks like beer and suggested I could do the same. So, it seems even if one is not an habitual drinker, like Dieumerci, they only have to look like they are drinking (and drink slowly so as not to be offered many more drinks) to fit into the social setting enough to be part of the conversations. More importantly though, the fact that Dieudonne reminded him that he was in a social gathering where drinks were being drunk and his story was being told without hint of ‘running away’ suggested that this was exactly the kind of place where he or anyone could be comfortable telling even their most personal stories.

It is because of this that there are many drinking bars through Nyamandem. Dieumerci, speaking on behalf of research conducted by his friend, stated that in just under two years “the number of bars in Nyamandem has increased from 3,002 to 4,500... not counting hundreds of circuits, chicken parlors, and other unlicensed drinking places where alcohol and food are sold round the clock (p. 103).” These official bars and other drinking places throughout Nyamandem and in the Swine Quarter in particular, are necessary to produce a social balance between people otherwise tormented and stunted by poverty. Because there are so many places both officially and otherwise that people can come to drink and socialize, the bars can be considered quite mobilizing.

Many of the appropriations of the mobile phone within socially marginalized African populations have been linked to the mobilizing abilities that have been developed since the introduction of this mobile technology. In this book, we see how the inaccessibility of the mobile phone has not stunted the Swine Quartets desires or abilities to be able to be mobile while still maintaining social circles. The drinking of alcohol as a social pastime and the multiple places for which this can be done gives the characters of the book enough freedom to move around and socialize as often as they would need or like. Dieudonne, in his career in servitude, has been moved from house to house working for several families (p. 64-5, 74-6). Through this movement between jobs he is mobile enough even without the aid of a mobile phone and still has the benefit of settling down at the Grand Canari bar after work meeting the same group of friends regardless of his latest work location, should he choose.

Accessing beer was not only possible through the generosity of individuals like Chopngomna. Beer companies also gave away millions of free beer with 'free beer' bottle caps. While mobile phones, televisions and cars were also offered on special bottle caps, they were far less likely to be won than beer. Free beer was so often won on bottle caps that Mimbolanders were beginning to use them as currency, threatening normal money. Even policeman were willing to accept bribes of free beer bottle caps (when money was not an option) in order to turn a blind eye to a taxi driver's faulty car or documents, for example. Dieudonne spoke of being "lucky as hell" at times coming to the bar with no money in his pockets, intending to drink on credit, when after several wins he not only has his share of beer in the bar but even leaves the bar with "a couple more free bottles, thanks to winning caps." Dieudonne stated that he guarded his winning caps jealously (p. 103-4). They mattered to him and he would never lose them. It would not be how it was when Lilly Loveless lost her mobile phone while doing research in Mimboland. Losing her phone in a taxi, Loveless was perplexed when she realized that the taxi driver would not return her phone even though she called it repeatedly to tell him that it was hers. Her research assistant

Britney justified the taxi driver's response to the situation by stating simply: "if it really mattered to you, it would still be with you as we speak" and "If you really needed it, you wouldn't lose it" (Nyamnjoh 2009:157). Free beer bottle caps, like the mobile phone for Mimboland, are not to be taken for granted. In Mimboland, once the mobile phone is acquired this technology is to be secured and kept safely in the hands of the owner lest it end up lost or stolen and taken as not being valued. The mobile phone is an object so lusted after that a lost or misplaced cell phone can only be assumed to have been deliberately neglected by the owner. Everyone in Mimboland wants or needs a cell phone and once they get one they take special care not to lose it (Nyamnjoh 2009). This seems also to be the case with free beer bottle caps in the Swine Quarter.

The Grand Canari Bar, among the many other bars, was a popular hangout place for socializing because as Dieudonne suggested "the bar offered everyone what they came to seek and was respected for that (2008:2)." Like Dieudonne, it seems that most Grand Canari bar goers, through the consumption of and being able to provide alcohol, sought acceptance among their peers and the courage to act on certain impulses uninhibited. Of alcohol, Dieudonne stated:

Alcohol served different ends to different consumers, and even non-consumers. Some drink to warm up, some to cool down, others to forget they should not be drinking. Some may not themselves drink, but they use alcohol purposefully. Those who are drunk need alcohol as clearance, and those who have experienced a sudden shock need it to steady their nerves. Some drink because they are unemployed, others to forget the pressures and boredom of work; some to celebrate happiness, others to cushion the burdens of despair, some to keep busy, others to keep idle; some to contest, others to condone. In some, alcohol induces feelings of bonhomie, in others hunger for violence and vengeance. Husbands drink for courage to start a quarrel with wives and divert attention from their failure to provide for their families while wives drink to challenge failing husbands (p. 102).

From the above passage we see that the consumption of alcohol has been appropriated toward various means. Reading Dieudonne's statement it occurred to me that unlike the mobile phone which needs the assistance of deliberate or human conscious effort and/or other technologies to be efficient, alcohol seems to be able to stand on its own. Not being a drinker myself, and staying away from people or atmospheres where drinking is done in abundance, I have little experience with the effects of alcohol in my personal life or the life of my family and friends. Dieudonne's statement that husbands and wives drink for courage to challenge each other or to warm up or cool down identifies alcohol as an active agent. To be technical one could say that alcohol cannot in fact work on its own as it needs to be drunk in order to induce whatever the intended feelings are of the drinker. Alcohol in a bottle just as an ownerless mobile phone is reduced to a mere liquid or object. It seems though that with (enough) alcohol things can happen to or for an individual with minimal effort of anyone else. The consumption of alcohol alone gives courage to challenge one's husband or wife. It is not as if they have to drink alcohol *and* do something else. Mobile phones on the other hand sometimes require additional communication from the recipient for an interaction to be successful. In terms of being considered important or prestigious, for example, with a mobile phone, it first takes the acknowledgement of a mobile phone to offer such fine qualities from at least one other individual for these qualities to stick. Furthermore, it may also be necessary for a certain type of phone to meet the approval of one or several other individuals to meet the requirements of making one important or prestigious.

Mobile phones and alcohol do, however, seem to have similar characteristics. Pelckmans (2009:33) suggested that mobile phones can induce "absence presence" in that that the functions of the mobile phone can be distracting. Referring to interviews being conducted by anthropologists while in the field, Pelckmans suggested that this absence presence can be so distractive that the contents of the interview (the questions for the informant or the answers for the

anthropologist) can be neglected. Hanson (2007:1) noted that some mobile phone users often seem oblivious to the world around them. She suggested that some mobile phone users experience what she calls a “technical psychosis” in that the technology intrudes on the reality of the world around them. The two technologies most associated with these behaviors are the mobile phone and the laptop computer with its access to the Internet. This absence presence that Pelckmans describes sounds a lot like technical psychosis. A similar effect can result from alcohol consumption as alcohol can sometimes result in loss of memory, acting outside of normal character or just making one completely oblivious to the things going on around them. This we see in the beginning of the book when a very drunk Dieudonne was stammering home oblivious to the bruising and bleeding of his skinny legs. We are also told of his sometimes embarrassing and disgusting habit of using the bathroom in his bed as he was too drunk to even realize that he needed to use the bathroom (Nyamnjoh 2008:5) Both the mobile phone and the alcohol can result in oblivion. As Dieudonne implied, some people drink deliberately to forget or become oblivious to the (maybe unwanted) realities around them but for others it could be detrimental.

As has been presented throughout my reflections of ICT appropriations in the Swine Quarter, there has been little need for the mobile phone. While in this environment the mobile phone still holds its place as a desired tool of communication however, its limited availability has made it a humble object only seen and used rarely. Where any void might be lingering due to the desires of the mobile phone for the have not's, alcohol is the most obvious filler. The consumption of alcohol and the many available drinking spots mobilizes people and encourages social gatherings while offering a place of comfort for the sharing of feelings or the neglecting of life's hardships – even if it also results in occasional oblivion. The introduction of this mobile technology has, for some populations, become the governing sources of prestige and higher social status and has been crucial for creating and maintaining social relationships

but as we have seen other people can still get by without them even if a few of their own have managed to attain some of the “success” attributed to the mobile phone. Were alcohol not so accessible for the Swine Quartets I wonder what then would take its place but for now I say: drink up Dieudonne, the next King Size is on me.

Social Media as a Tool for Activism

The reality is no one can deny the fact that the *concept* of social media has played and is playing a significant role in the everyday lives of human beings all over the world. New social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter, for example, are significantly different from older Internet applications such as e-mails particularly because of the control they extend to their users, gaining success through their user-generated content (Lee 2011:2). But whether social media *tools* (social network sites and the devices from which they can be accessed) have played and are playing similarly significant roles around the world is open to debate. And whether either of their roles is positive or negative is subject to personal opinions and experiences. The rapid integration of ICTs and reference to social networking sites in many societies might imply, among other things that their role is positive but that implication should not be taken for granted.

Social media rely on the Internet (Hoffman & Kornweitz 2011:7). Cell phones and the Internet are primary outlets for communication via social media platforms. From casual or intimate communication to participation in a worldwide protest, social media has become a way (some might say *the* way) of life. Social networking sites have become the fastest communication alternative and now seem to be the most appropriate and effective liaisons between (most) people and the world around them. In their compression of time and space they have provided opportunities for quick and easy communication and information sharing in real time regardless of an individual's location (Gladwell 2010). Simply owning or having access to these technologies offers a range of social networking platforms that allow the rapid sharing of various types of information across the world and the ability to respond in whatever way one desires with minimal censorship. Where cell phone technology and platforms like

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have become dominant sources of communication providing opportunities for people to create, restore and maintain relationships, these same platforms are becoming more and more common to use as tools of activism particularly because of the speed at which activists can share information and potentially recruit others in their activism. Whether or not social media is a necessary, adequate, better or worse form of social activism (or perhaps the cause of social activism) remains a popular debate in light of the rapid use social media in political and social uprisings in some parts of the world (Gladwell 2010, 2011; Adams 2011; Beaumont 2011; Hoffman & Kornweitz 2011; Kravets 2011).

Though this paper addresses the current debates around the pros, cons, and meanings behind using social media as a tool for activism I wish to also dwell on another aspect in the world of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and that aspect is the relationship between individuals and their technologies, an area all too neglected. Understanding the relationships that people have with their technology can create a better understanding of why or why not some people enjoy and prefer to use communication technologies and perhaps reveal some general dissonances around social media uprisings. Though the revelation that society shapes technology as much as, if not more than, technology shapes society (Castells 1996/2000; Ito *et al* 2005; Horst & Miller 2006; de Bruijn *et al* 2009; Miller 2011), there is still a tendency to assume that users of ICTs are ever happy, ever satisfied with their devices. Consequently, a general assumption that people prefer to use ICTs in most aspects of their lives, including social activism, because of the assumed harmony in techno-social relationships could prevail despite this problematic tendency. Techno-social relationships, as with any relationship, are not always harmonious and are never always stable. There are both good and bad times. My own experiences of the joys and hardships of owning a cell phone in Cape Town (see chapter 2 in this book), has led me to believe that for some people, bad or frustrating times occur more frequently than the good even though there continues to be avid use of the technology all over the world.

The cell phone and the Internet have become a necessary part of everyday life and indeed, individuals who have not succumbed to these technologies are among the minority. And with these technologies being relatively easy to use and becoming increasingly accessible all over the world it can quite honestly be seen as unacceptable to be a part of that minority. My existence as a cell phoneless individual in New York⁷ has sometimes left me feeling inadequate. At times I feel that my choice not to own a cell phone in New York makes me a rebel. This, however, has not compelled me to conform but as one of the minority, I can admit that it is sometimes easy to feel frustrated as my options for communication are sometimes limited, though not dysfunctional as some comments or questions from active cell phone users might suggest. Acknowledging my own ambivalence towards owning a cell phone, an acknowledgement particularly enhanced because of my dual identities as an active cell phone user in Cape Town and a cell phoneless individual in New York, I expect that most individuals grapple with total satisfactory and confidence in certain technologies. While this expectation is not in itself unique and indeed most people might expect to, at times, be less than satisfied with their technological devices, I suggest that this lack of complete satisfaction and confidence can affect our (multiple) uses of these devices. In light of the current use of social media, I address the growing popularity of social media in social activism and I reveal some of the reasons why some people, myself included, believe that the use of social media in social activism is more detrimental than effective. My own beliefs are influenced by what others have said (see below) but stem out of a desire to challenge the taken for granted everyday relations between technology and society. I do not intend, however, to sway the reader to be for or against the use of social media per se but to kindle a different kind of thinking around ICTs and social media in general.

⁷ I do not own a cell phone in New York. I initially purchased a cell phone in Cape Town for easy communication with my family back home.

Social Media: a Voice for the People and a Tool for Activism

It has been suggested that social media platforms, as tools for activism, provide opportunities for otherwise powerless individuals to coordinate and give voice to their concerns. In this way, the traditional relationship between political authority and popular will has been shifted (Gladwell 2010:2). One such example of the use of social media giving voice and empowering individuals occurred in late February of 2011. During this time the Middle East and North Africa experienced a series of uprisings that have been referred to as “Facebook” and “Twitter Revolutions”. In these particular uprisings the Internet significantly increased the speed at which participants could communicate and transfer information around the world while avoiding, at least some of the time, official censorship; expressing freely all they wanted to say. In Tunisia, for example, the youth, also known as the Internet Generation, were the primary participants of the uprisings. They focused all their energy, often non-violently, towards a “democratic political change”. It has been said that the youth are most effective when using these tools. Today, words on Facebook, Twitter and videos on YouTube are powerful means of mobilizing mass amounts of people and gaining worldwide support. Through the accelerated use of the Internet and mobile communications for such uprisings, it would appear that, currently, participation in social activism has increased as compared to previously used methods (Shah 2011).

The Efficiency of Social Media

While, it can be concluded, from the above example, that social media is a successful means of not just informing others but increasing active participation from greater populations, Miller (2011:189) suggests, of the use of Facebook, for example, “...the fact that activists clearly use Facebook is not evident that Facebook turns more people into activists. There is at least as much hype about the Internet making us more shallow than deep or more passive than

active”. Hoffman & Kornweitz (2011:8) argue that social media are simply a new way of getting involved, not an incentive to do so. In spite of the undisputed reality that social media increases the sharing and spreading of news, it is not necessarily equally successful at recruiting participants. Since the occurrence of the Tunisia and similar uprisings, there has been a growing argument around the role of social media in popular unrests and uprisings and whether or not the use of social media should be identified as a revolution.

Malcolm Gladwell (2010, 2011), a leading voice in the debate, argues that too little attention is being paid to the intent or outcome of the revolution. Instead, the attention has shifted to the means in which the uprising has taken place. In his controversial article presented in the New Yorker in October of 2010, Gladwell stated “where activists were once defined by their causes, they are now defined by their tools”. David Kravets (2011) also pleaded with readers in his response to the Mideast protest and the attention it was receiving as a result of the massive use of Twitter, not to be so quick to call the event a ‘Twitter Revolution’. “Don’t confuse tools with root causes, or means with ends,” he added. From the above claims we see that the concept of social media (as an efficient means of widespread and quick sharing of information) far outweighs even the initial motivations and intentions behind the root cause of such uprisings in relevance and this has become the primary reason for the newly proclaimed success of social media in social activism. As Gladwell (2010, 2011) and Kravets (2011) have argued, social media as a tool is receiving too much attention perpetuating the belief that it is technologies that reshape societies, forgetting that techno-social relationships are mutual as societies simultaneously reshape technologies (de Bruijn *et al* 2009).

In this paper I give attention to ICTs and social media not in defiance to Gladwell and Kravets’s claims but to explore both sides of the equation and to understand this euphoria around social media in its new role as a tool for social activism. In my own experience with ICTs, the cell phone in particular, I have noticed how relatively simple it is to communicate a need or request to someone (near or

far) at any time and to receive a response (sometimes helpful, sometimes not) within minutes. Not only do ICTs often result in quick responses but they have become increasingly accessible and are easy enough to use and, I would imagine, preferable to other methods for many users. New communication technologies like the mobile phone and the Internet, in their convenience, would require little effort on behalf of an individual should they decide to become a participant in an event such as the Tunisia uprising.

People tend to decide whether a tool is useful or even pleasurable depending on how fast they can make a connection (Hanson 2007). For many, these mobile technologies are the epitome of usefulness and pleasure because of their convenience. Furthermore there is the assumption that the convenience of social networking will create an influx of participants in social uprisings. The interactivity of 'new' media holds the promise of increased engagement (Hoffman & Kornweitz 2011: 7-12). It might take anywhere from a couple of seconds or a few minutes to Tweet, Facebook, instant message, SMS or email. Still, despite the duration it takes to compose and send a message, a single message sent by Twitter, for example, would take just minutes to spread throughout the entire world (Ekine 2010) maximizing the intended effect of the message with minimal (physical) work from the sender. "Virtual participation" where clicking a 'thumbs up' icon on your desktop substitutes for more costly, time consuming, and potentially more thought-through real life activism. While the potential of such technologies in producing mass communication towards social or political change in such a short period of time could be seen as a primary benefit particularly where past uprisings may have taken considerably longer to accrue participants and gain national attention, one should not look past the subtle yet significant losses that can be attributed to this method of uprising not least of all, the attention they take away from the reason behind the event itself. Hoffman & Kornweitz (2011:10) suggest that the focus should not be on *how* to communicate but *who* is listening and with what effect (their emphasis).

The Perceived Flaws of Social Media

Matthew Johnson (2011: 17-19 in Lee 2011) cites Gladwell (2010) who argued that social networks such as Facebook and Twitter “will not usher in a new age of social activism but that they and the relationships they foster are actually detrimental to real social change.” Social networks, he continues, requires very little commitment from participants. Though social media revolutions such as those that occurred throughout Middle East and North Africa offer accelerated nationwide attention and fast-acting responses and reactions, they also, in a sense, devalue the significance of tangible effort and face-to-face social interaction usually potent in contributing towards social or political changes. The elimination of social interaction and tangible work towards such a change can result in an unsustainable outcome. That is to say that while a social media revolution’s worldwide support and attention can result in an initial positive outcome, a possible need for further support, protestation or unrest, from participants, beyond a message on Facebook or an SMS to sustain the outcome may be considerably more difficult to accrue. The implementation of these mobile technologies in such uprisings can also lead to increased anonymity among participants, leading to a lack of accountability which can ultimately lead to a lack of credibility behind the said reasons of motivation and could lead to false positive outcomes.

Despite one’s motivation (legit or otherwise) to join or participate in a social media revolution, it should be taken into consideration that they might have done so only under the protection and the guaranteed anonymity of social networking sites which often requires no prominent piece of identification. Facebook identities and email addresses, for example, can be coded or have fake names protecting the real identities of people. Cell phone numbers may also prove difficult to trace in cases of mass communication (should tracing them be of any importance). If there were a need to contact participants of an uprising for future support or even to question their reasons or desired outcomes for participation it might prove

difficult and motives, whether necessary or not, may be inaccessible. Some participants may participate only for recognition. Participation in social media uprisings, to me, seems almost like an easy way to make a name for yourself even if no one of supreme importance knows who you are. Social networking sites are public and participants can be virtually visible (though perhaps not identifiable) at any time. Being able to tell a friend or a colleague (and even a stranger) that you were part of an uprising – regardless of the goal of the uprising – and participated in such a manner might be a major reason for participating particularly because not all mobile devices are as advanced as others and some may lack the features that provide such opportunities.

Other participants might only have been responding to a forwarded email that randomly appeared in their inbox. That they took the time to respond at all instead of deleting the email or that they took the time to compose a message to text or Tweet, for example, is not to be minimized or dismissed but it should be taken into account that many participants may not have responded (or been able to respond) if it were not so convenient and required more of a physical effort. This then can result in a lack of further participation from the participants and an unclear stance in the motivation of the participants which can result in poor consequences or the maximization of the potential and the maintenance of the desired outcome.

It should also be noted that technologies like the cell phone and the Internet have been credited with making it possible to involve the younger generation in social and political problems and activism. These social media outlets may be one of the few ways to win the attention of youth who, as Shah (2011) indicated, spend a lot of their time on their cell phones and/or using the Internet and are therefore most effective when using these technologies. If a need for youth in addition to the participation of the elder population was called for, these social media outlets could be beneficial. However, there is also the possibility that an uprising solely demonstrated through social media could be negative in that it would eliminate those who do not

have access to social networking technologies or those who are uncomfortable using or just refuse (the minority that has not succumb) to use them. Pelckmans (2009:31-6) suggested that anthropologists who use cell phones to help facilitate their accumulation of informants for their research could produce biased research results in that only those with access to a cell phone were able to participate. The same is so with uprisings solely conducted through social media. Only individuals with access to social media outlets will have a chance to participate eliminating those who may have stronger or better reasons for wanting to participate or those who could potentially be more powerful outside of social media constrictions.

I have mentioned earlier that social media uprisings, by way of the Internet, require little effort on the part of the participant and can be considered quite a desired option for participating in many events. It is easy to gain dozens, hundreds and even thousands of participants by *not* asking too much of them. By making the process of participation easy you can get people to join a campaign on someone else's behalf. Gladwell (2010:5) says that social media is low risk activism since there is no threat to physical bodily harm under the protection of a computer screen or behind the contents of a text message sent in reply to an opinion. Furthermore, social media networks are effective at increasing participation by lessening the motivation that participation requires. Incidentally, one of the most attractive features of the Internet is its ability to interact with others while still enjoying privacy and solitude (Cothran 2002). It serves as an outlet for social interaction even in situations where face-to-face interaction would cause fear or anxiety (Hanson 2007). These media outlets produce anonymity and with anonymity there is a lack of accountability. Considerable evidence suggests that the Internet facilitates the invention of online personalities that may be the complete opposite of offline realities (Cothran 2002:28). People can express themselves in a way that they would not if their identities were known. "De-individuation" happens when social norms are withdrawn because identities are concealed. The combination of a

faceless crowd and personal anonymity provokes individuals into breaking rules that under 'normal' circumstances they would not have considered. Digital media allows almost unlimited opportunity for willful de-individuation. The less you feel you will be identified, the more uninhibited you can be (Adams 2011).

I am reminded of a movie I saw called *The Surrogates*⁸. Very broadly, the movie portrayed a futuristic world where humans did not function in the outside world on their own but through surrogate robots. During one scene a beautiful young woman was seen dancing and flirting with a dominant male character. As circumstances led to the murder of this male character's surrogate (which tragically led to his human death- it is one of the main plots in the movie to find out how/why), it became necessary to speak to the woman who was with him at the time of the murder. When the police came to the woman's home, they found that she was not a woman. She was in fact an older, overweight, balding male. This introduced the realities that humans were not just living casually through their surrogates but were living fantasies that may have been impossible given their physical appearance, gender, health or age. I use this example to suggest that social media platforms too can provide the same security for people as the surrogate did for this male not just as a means of participating in an uprising in secret but perhaps to participate under the guise of another or multiple identities.

Social media allows one person to secure multiple identities. The alternate identities afforded by the anonymity of the Internet also lie within a reality that many people are not who or what they claim to be through their words on Facebook, Twitter and the like. Despite the forces they claim to be for or against in their messages, one might in reality – offline, not be for or against what they claim. It is also important to note that with one person able to secure multiple identities via the Internet, an accurate quantity of participants might never be possible. One person can potentially respond dozens of

⁸The Surrogates (2009), starring Bruce Willis, Radha Mitchell & Ving Rhames. Action/Sci-Fi/Thriller. Rated PG-13. 89 minutes.

times towards the same event under different aliases without detection falsely increasing participation levels. This room for dishonesty might also cause a lack in credibility. Honesty is something that most people take for granted and I do not suggest that social media uprisings should warrant an automatic suspicion of dishonesty. I simply suggest that social media uprisings can be more likely to result in dishonesty given the outlets used for participation.

Techno-social relationships

I have given several reasons why the use of social media in social uprisings may be less than efficient for purposeful and successful outcomes of social uprisings. The most significant reasons, I perceive to be are the lack of commitment and the ability to send a message at the click a button without tangible effort to follow up the cause of the uprising. The above reasons all fall under the general category of the relatively easy and identification concealment features of ICTs. While these two features might be the primary incentives for some ICT users to join social networking sites and perhaps participate in social media uprisings, another factor for using ICTs in this way could be the relationships we have with our technologies, particularly cell phones and the Internet. We manipulate our cell phone and Internet uses to meet our personal needs and we are subconsciously manipulated by them, for or against those needs. I think we give too much power to our cell phones, email correspondences and social networking sites. Whether we know it or not, we have deeply intimate relationships with these technologies and sites. This reality is significant because these relationships can reveal much of what people think they know about ICTs and social media and why. Social media has been given a prestigious rank within many populations because of the authority it gives to its users, the multiple opportunities it offers for communicating such as texts, pictures, social networks and games, and its ability to share and spread information quickly (Lee 2011). These attributes all work towards a

flattering concept of social media when the reality may prove otherwise.

What happens when our relationships with technology goes sour? Disharmony between an individual and their technological device can result from technical difficulties such the device's inability to work correctly due to random malfunctions, for example, but it could also result from the emotional experiences that occur between individuals and their devices. An expectation of excessive or constant availability via the use of ICTs can cause emotional strain when communication is not as consistent as one would expect. I used my cell phone to get out of conversing and committing to social obligations with people. I hid behind my cell phone, knowing that cell phones are expected to offer accessibility to anyone at any time. Though I deliberately avoided answering my phone and responding to text messages most of the time, I somehow attempted to make those who I was hiding from feel that it was them who called or texted at the wrong times because my cell phone, as is the normal expectation, provided excellent service. This all began to work against me when I wanted people to call or text me and they did not. I had so often used my cell phone to get out of casual communication or social gatherings and I subsequently developed hatred toward my phone when my social life was not what I wanted it to be. I had given so much power to my cell phone that it became an entity responsible for ruining my social life, almost as if other people were trying to contact me but it was my cell phone that did not let the calls come through. Crazy though that may sound, my relationship with my cell phone was really compromised at times and I would not use it for days at a time, like I was trying to punish it for ruining my social life (see chapter 2 of this book).

I use this personal reference to show that at times my emotional relationship with my cell phone left me feeling like I did not want anything to do with it. I used it as little as possible and would never consider using it to respond to some kind of political protest for example, because I had lost respect in it as a device. Understanding that hiding behind cell phones and the Internet as a form of anonymity creates a breeding ground for participants who might

normally be inactive in a social uprising, when one relates to their cell phone or Facebook, for example, as emotionally as I once did, social media may be significantly less appealing and may actually decrease participation. Furthermore, I hoped to stress the fact that the *concept* of social media as a quick and efficient means of communicating and uprising, resulting in positive results is not synonymous with the reality. This concept, first of all, relies on a constant adequate function of technology which many of us know is not true all of the time. The concept also relies on a person's willingness to use the device in such a way which may seem to be the norm but who knows what the actual number of participants are out there, what with the potential to create multiple identities and all. Finally as has been suggested earlier in the paper, virtual participation may simply draw attention to a cause without actually changing it.

Conclusion

I wonder if any this matters. If all that matters is gaining multitudes of participants to make an impact for social or political changes then the recent social media revolutions that have just taken place are perfect. I do not pretend that the anonymity provided by social media revolutions does not create a welcoming breeding for participants who might otherwise not have found the courage to voice their opinions if they had to do so in person. Nor do I neglect the fact that the convenience and relatively low effort of a social media revolution can also contribute to a wider population of willing participants. In some instances, convenience and lack of human interaction are crucial to one's willingness to participate. Does lack of identity really create issues? Does the fact that one might only have participated because of convenience even matter? Does the fact that no physical labor was involved somehow lessen the effort behind the attempt?

Once upon a time people spoke to each other. Later they wrote letters to one another expressing feelings, acknowledging birthdays and anniversaries and sharing information. Then came stationery

cards which one conveniently has only to fill in the “To:” and “From:” sections and let the cards express their feelings for them. Then the Internet came along and changed everything and like the youth in Tunisia we have become an “Internet Generation” which makes almost everything easier in its convenience. With the functions of the social media doing our work for us at the simple sending of a message, are we really active participants or are we merely submissive followers trapped in the convenience of the Internet generation?

The Internet and the Cell Phone⁹

The Internet and the cell phone, as we already know, are communication technologies worthy of in-depth research not only because of their increased and rapid integration all over the world and the innovative appropriations associated with them in many societies but also because of the overwhelming reliance on these devices by their owners. Many individuals hold these devices in high esteem growing evermore dependent on them in their day-to-day living. Using a cell phone, (most often inclusive of Internet access), has become a routine and necessary part of so many lives that many cell phone owners do not leave their house without their phone and would be uncomfortable getting through the day without it. Despite the fact that these technologies have not always proven to be the best solution for enhancing our desires for more efficient and constant communication – and have, on occasion, proven to exacerbate rather than facilitate our communication needs – they are still revered, by many, as great, all-purpose, all-positive communication devices.

In tune with the world's increasing reliance on these technologies, new and improved cell phones and social media functions are consistently produced to stay abreast with our desires and demands. Alternatively, while some of the more indigenous and other previous forms of communication around the world still retain their value (though may be used less frequently with the advent of new communication technologies), there has been the need for people to

⁹ This chapter is a dual review of: Miller, Daniel & Don Slater. 2000. *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* Berg Publishers ISBN: 1859733840 (ISBN: 978-1-8597-3384-4 (pbk) and Horst, Heather & Daniel Miller. 2006. *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication* Berg Publishers Oxford New York ISBN: 1845204018 (ISBN: 978-1-8452-0401-3 (pbk)

develop and keep abreast of new technology in order to communicate effectively (Castells 2000: 7; Mushengezezi 2003: 115). Both the Internet and the cell phone are growing more and more intelligent and their “reasoning capabilities” are increasingly becoming “more and more indistinguishable from the human brain” (Keen 2012). Some might even describe them as autonomous devices neglecting to acknowledge the mutual relationship between technology and society for adequate functioning on both ends. We often fail to realize that communication technologies, in spite of the seemingly endless possibilities offered by their many functions, can quite literally be sterile and useless objects outside of conscious and tangible effort from people. We tend to minimize the reality that neither the Internet nor the cell phone can stand alone; both are used alongside spoken word and/or other forms of technology and may require (ir)regular financial maintenance to secure proper functioning. However, they are often portrayed as magically omnipotent and are viewed as active agents in the social world (Miller & Slater 2000:193).

This view of technology as an active agency in the social world could be resultant from the acknowledgement that, even if to a much lesser degree than the acceleration of mobility in their compression of time and space, information and communication technologies (ICTs) accelerate social mobility. The adoption and integration of mobile communication technologies around the world have created possibilities for new kinds of social networking (Ling and Campbell 2011:1; Lamoureux 2011; de Bruijn *et al* 2010:270-71, 2009; Horst & Miller 2006; Castells 1996/kj2000; Miller & Slater 2000) for many. The role of mobile communication technologies in the facilitation of social networking should not reinforce the idea of technological determinism as technology does not pre-determine use, but is adopted and used in creative and innovative ways by different groups of people with the anticipation of fulfilling specific needs (Lamoureux 2011:13). The academic world has yet to tire of exploring the various appropriations attributed to these technologies within different societies in search of – but not limited to – enhancing and expanding social networks.

With mutual desires to ethnographically explore material cultures, particularly relations between people, new media and social networking, material culture anthropologist Daniel Miller joins sociologist Don Slater and socio-cultural anthropologist Heather Horst on a quest to greater understand the Internet and cell phones within particular populations. Miller and Slater's (2000) *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* is a product of an extensive ethnographic study to learn what "Trinidadians find in the Internet, what they make of it and how they relate its possibilities to themselves and their futures" (p. 1). Horst and Miller's (2006) *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication* is part of a larger ethnographic study to assess the relationships between new information and communication technologies and poverty alleviation in different parts of the world. Their study focuses on low-income Jamaicans to learn the simultaneous impact of cell phones on Jamaicans and the impact of Jamaicans on cell phone potential (p. 1-2, 181).

Providing ethnographic analyses of information and communication technologies within Trinidad and Jamaica, these ethnographies present us with a different angle of what we have already learned or think we know about the Internet and the cell phone. I use the authors' placement of the Internet and the cell phone within the particular local cultural practices and social meanings to grapple with the idea of viewing such technologies as active agents in the social world. Most interesting to me was the sense of identity awarded and afforded by the introduction and use of these technologies on these Caribbean islands. While social networking and bringing unfulfilled and unrealized desires and potentials to pass were addressed in length in both books, the provision of space that these devices provide for the production and performance of Trinidadian-ness and Jamaican-ness was also highly regarded as a crucial benefit among these technologies. To understand how such inanimate objects as cell phones and computers could be this crucial to social networking, *expansive realization* and *expansive potential* (see below) and a people's identity is to admit their undeniable agency only in the hands of active and adequate users. Though I fear that too much credit has

been given to these devices I am not naïve enough to ignore the potentials and possibilities that have been in effect since their introduction, particularly those that I have read about in Africa and particular African countries (Essoungou 2011; de Bruijn *et al* 2010, 2009; Nyamnjoh 2005) in Japan (Ito *et al* 2005) and more recently Trinidad (Miller & Slater 2000) and Jamaica (Horst & Miller 2006). My fear is based on the supernatural and magical omnipotence that these devices are credited with almost irrespective of their users. In this paper, I present the findings of the three authors building on them to confront my own fears in this matter.

The Internet

Let me begin with the Internet. Miller and Slater's (2000) ethnographic study of the Internet proved particularly valuable in a place such as Trinidad because it contradicted preconceived notions of ICTs in developing countries. Where common preconceptions indicated that the introduction of new technologies in developing countries would increase inequalities within the population, strengthening the digital divide, the introduction and the use of the Internet in Trinidad seemed "to cut across rather than exacerbate social divisions" (p. 44). As Trinidad is not a homogenous society, Miller and Slater show that the Internet fits "into a wide range of distinctions meeting many social barriers" (p. 52). Here we see that much like we later learn about Facebook in Miller's (2011) *Tales from Facebook* (see also Chapter 8 in this book), the Internet is not representative of any one thing even within a single population. Instead, the Internet is used and manipulated to fit a multitude of desires even among individuals from the same place.

We learn that Trinidad is not a homogenous society and use of the Internet is also not homogenous within Trinidad. However, Miller and Slater suggest however "absurd"¹⁰, that Trinidadians have

¹⁰ Miller & Slater state that it is "absurd to claim that Trinidadians have a special affinity to the Internet..." (2000:3).

a natural (or special) affinity to the Internet as it has rapidly and quite effortlessly become a part of their lives. They claim that for Trinidadians the Internet fit naturally “into their family, friendship, work and leisure and in some respects they seemed to experience the Internet itself as ‘naturally Trinidadian’” (p. 2-3). To imply that Trinidadians have a natural affinity to the Internet and similarly that the Internet could be experienced as naturally Trinidadian portrays the Internet as a technology created by Trinidadians with Trinidadians being the sole benefactors of its potential despite the myriad of other users around the world. This, I know, is not the authors’ intent. A first interpretation might conclude that to suggest that Trinidadians have a natural affinity to something that is a Western production speaks to the flexibilities of the Internet as a system that was perhaps created by a specific person or group, for specific purposes (whatever they may have been) with intended use by specific people yet was still conformed to meet the needs of others. This ultimately suggests that the Internet was a fixed (Western) invention manipulated in the hands of a different culture. The authors conclude, however, that there was never an “‘Internet’ that here has been differentially appropriated because of the diverse forms and contexts in which it is found... the Internet only ever existed in the specificity of its use...” (p. 192). That the Internet was so effortlessly assimilated into Trinidadian culture reinforces the idea that there is no such thing as “the Internet”. It is or becomes whatever its users want or need it to be.

Miller and Slater’s study of the Internet was geared toward gaining better knowledge of both the Internet and Trinidadians. One of their aims was to observe how the Internet was being used to maintain “particular facets of what being Trinidadian was supposed to mean” (p. 3) as the Internet was seen a place to perform “Trini-ness” and to “represent Trinidad (p. 7, 87). The authors claim that being “Trini” was crucial to peoples encounter with the Internet as the participants in their study revealed the extent to which they went to “make the Internet a Trini place, a place where they could be Trini...” (p. 85). Along with the potential to maintain and spread

Trini-ness, the Internet was also useful for mending broken families. In Trinidad, the Internet has acted as a bridge connecting families separated by distance. As many families in Trinidad are divided for various reasons, two of the crucial benefits of the Internet, according to the authors, are its ability to re-establish the types of family contact that would have existed in a non-diaspora and its potential to expand the family as a “viable unit of sociality” (p. 58). With internet connection increasing the frequency of contact among divided families, for example, this new form of communication has minimized the inconsistencies of physically living together as a family. Virtual presence via the Internet, for some parents, has compensated the guilt they feel (or felt) for leaving their children behind while moving abroad, for example. The Internet has introduced the possibilities for new kinds of relationships (p. 55-61).

Miller and Slater further explain that the Internet has been of immense help to Trinidadians for creating opportunities for individuals to live out dormant dreams. The term *expansive realization* has been used to define the Internet’s ability to help Trinidadians “become what they always wanted to be” (p. 85). In this case, the Internet, then, has been credited with facilitating ideas and goals that were already always intrinsically Trinidadian. Furthermore, the term *expansive potential* speaks to the Internet’s potential to show (in this case) Trinidadians what they *could* be in the future (my emphasis p. 164). Where ideas, desires and dreams may have already always existed but lay dormant or unspoken among Trinidadians, the introduction of the Internet has provided the avenues for those desires to both come to pass and be further built upon or extended for future opportunities.

Miller and Slater shared that Trinidadian narratives about the Internet revealed complaints about the “unbearable slowness of its development and the forces that were preventing things from changing as fast as they could” (p. 3). Perhaps this was a result of the Internet being revered as an all-powerful, ‘natural’ technology with the ability to repair broken families and expose and facilitate the undone. Trinidadians, it seems, view the Internet as the last and

ultimate resort to accomplishing unfulfilled desires leaving them with little tolerance for a slow paced development. This ethnography reveals the opportunities that the Internet has offered Trinidadians. As Miller and Slater do not focus on any particularly negative aspects or complaints around the Internet in Trinidad I thought it was telling that the only complaint that was referred to was the lack of speed and slow development as admitted by participants. I further draw out this point after discussing the cell phone below.

The Cell phone

With basic preconceptions that the cell phone was dramatically changing the lives of low-income Jamaicans, Horst and Miller's (2006) ethnography on the cell phone (and their anthropological approach to communication) sought to learn if and in what ways this was true. Acknowledging that the variety of innovations that have come to be associated with the cell phone may not be congruent with what Jamaicans consider when using their phones, the authors state:

We first have to understand the ways in which people see themselves as frustrated and diminished by deficiencies in their ability to communicate but also whether they feel enriched or quite possibly threatened by new forms of communication... we need to understand these things... through idioms and language by which a population comes to experience and express their relationship to the phone (p. 23).

Though the authors had a preconceived assumption about the impact of the cell phone within this particular population, to approach the study by first understanding if and in what ways low-income Jamaicans grapple with deficiencies in satisfactory communication and how they feel about and refer to the phone was useful towards truly learning what cell phones were and what they had become on this island.

Acknowledging the assumption that the adoption of new media entails people seizing opportunities and possibilities that they have to offer in order to successfully complete “unprecedented tasks” (p. 6), the authors suggest instead that new media technologies are used to successfully achieve historic desires that have yet to be fulfilled due to the limitations of previous technologies (p. 6-7). This we know from Miller and Slater (2000:85) to be ‘expansive realization’ where the cell phone has not specifically created new desires and possibilities among low-income Jamaicans but has provided opportunities for desires that were already always present. From Horst and Miller’s study, we learn that a major desire of low-income Jamaicans is simply to communicate. Maintaining close contact with one’s social networks is crucial for everyday survival (p. 89-97, 108). ‘Link-up’, as it is called, is a viable solution to coping during life’s hardships. The authors tell us that “the difference between being poor and not being poor is having friends that you can call on in the time of need” (p. 111). The greatest use of the cell phone among low-income Jamaicans has been to facilitate linking up, helping to create extensive networks that provide support when necessary (p. 89, 93-4).

The cell phone has made quick contact with others in times of hardships an easier alternative than was previously possible. Though linking up is mostly used for economic development and coping, it is not only a solution used in times of trouble (p. 96). ‘Link-up’ and maintaining consistent communication with others even about casual affairs or nothing in particular is crucial to keeping social networks active for social prosperity and ultimately ensuring their availability when crises and times of need do arrive. Lamoureaux, in her study of cell phone use among University students in Khartoum, speaks of ‘keeping in touch’ where much like ‘link-up’ in Jamaica, cell phones are highly appropriated in this regard particularly the texting function. Successfully keeping in touch via text for example, does not mean that one must send specific kinds of messages. It is not the content of messages that is important but the very act of keeping in touch itself regardless of the content. The mere gesture of contact is

sufficient for maintaining friendships (2011:38) and securing social networks.

Contrary to their assumptions that the introduction of the cell phone's greatest impact was its profound effect on employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for low-income Jamaican families, Horst and Miller found instead that the cell phone's most dominant role is its facilitation of "connectedness" (Horst & Miller 2006:113). Being able to secure and maintain connections among social kin, as stated above is a necessary survival tactic for low-income Jamaicans. Those who cannot secure and maintain viable connections with social kin are at a loss and it was this discrepancy that left some low-income individuals and families more vulnerable than others. Unlike what the presence of the Internet revealed in Trinidad regarding social divisions and its innocence in exacerbating the digital divide (Miller & Slater 2000:44), the introduction of the cell phone in Jamaica has indeed agitated the differences between the rich and the poor (2006:2). Not just between the very rich and the very poor but even among the poor who were lucky enough to own cell phones and those who were not. The authors found that in Jamaica, at the time of their study, lack of a phone labeled an individual as particularly deficient. They further claimed that lack of a phone would eventually "come to signify not so much poverty as destitution" (p. 59-60).

So strong was the desire to own a cell phone that low-income Jamaicans could not see or perhaps chose to ignore the negative impact that using a cell phone had on them financially. The authors found that most "low-income households relied entirely on the cell phone" (p. 74). They claimed to have adopted the cell phone to save money despite the reality that cell phone calls were more expensive than both landline and international calls (p. 30). Horst and Miller claim that Jamaicans are "in denial" about the cost of cell phones and are unwilling to recognize just how much more expensive cell phones are for them to use (p. 76). This finding, however, is not unique to low-income Jamaicans. In South Africa, for example, evidence has shown that some low-income users use cell phones that they can barely afford (Sithole 2004 cited in Tlabela 2007:8) simply to be able

to communicate, affirm their belonging (Nyamnjoh 2005) and to maintain or elevate their position, however marginal, to a particular side of the digital divide. We learn that in Jamaica cell phones were desirable for their most evident features including mobility, individual control and privacy, all of which though beneficial, are secondary to the possibilities for constancy of communication (Horst and Miller 2006:79). And while cell phones are often worn quite visibly and it is common for people to dress in a way that matches their cell phone, the device, above all else, functions as a system of communication as opposed to an accessory (p. 62-4). While low-income Jamaicans are not said to have a “natural affinity” to the cell phone, as is apparently the case among Trinidadians and the Internet (Miller and Slater 2000:6 see above), we learn that the integration was also seemingly effortless with its natural enhancement of the crucial obligations of linking-up.

The Internet and cell phones as active agents in society

In the beginning of this paper I stated that communication technologies, without conscious and tangible effort from people, are nothing more than sterile and useless objects. On their own they are inanimate devices in spite of their overwhelming “reasoning capabilities” and their increasing likeness to the human brain (Keen 2012). It is all too common for these devices to be given too much credit for their roles in society. Horst and Miller (2006:193) suggest that “we should not be afraid to view technology as an active agency in the social world”. Acknowledging their vulnerability and useless nature outside of conscious human effort makes me question these communication technologies as true active agents. How can communication technologies be accorded such high levels of agency when they are not autonomous? What are the qualities that give communication technologies their agency? A cell phone sitting on display in a store, for example, is worthless (apart from the visual appeal it may have to viewers). It is only when it is purchased and used by its owner that it begins to be something worth valuing and

even this depends on the owner's intentions for and success while using the device. People have agency. Using a cell phone entails sharing *our* agency with it (my emphasis Lasen 2011:86). Without us, can we say that the Internet or cell phones are active agents?

British-American entrepreneur and professional skeptic Andrew Keen argues that currently, our mobile devices have too much power over us (2012). I agree that we are too comfortable with the position that these technologies have taken in our lives. We are too content with their mastery over us. We sit back and let our cell phones and social media sites dictate our lives on a variety of levels as without these devices "... one forgets where one should be and what one is supposed to be doing" (Horst and Miller 2006:65). We begin our days by accessing our cell phones and engaging on the Internet. We obsessively check our emails, Facebook pages and incoming text messages throughout the day. We often feel lost or naked without our cell phones (*ibid*; Keen 2012). Internet access is a top priority for many. The speed at which cell phones and the Internet are accessible and connect us to people and organizations that we want to be connected with is crucial as this determines its satisfactory status for many users (Hanson 2007).

That the Internet has been so successful in Trinidad yet was reprimanded because of its slow speed and development (Miller and Slater 2000) is significant to our dependence on and impatience with these technologies to perform in anyway but the best regardless of the numerous opportunities that have presented themselves only with these technologies. It is because of our increasing reliance on these devices that they are so easily regarded as supernatural. Furthermore, this supernatural and omnipotent reputation has forced us to regard these devices as having agency. Referring to the leaps and bounds that communication technologies have on the creation and maintenance of social networks and its roles in expansive realization and expansive potential one might be forced to admit the power of their potential. Indeed, there is no doubt that cell phones and the Internet have had a significant impact on many people throughout the world for a variety of reasons. One needs only to remember that

their success is a result of a two-sided equation involving us and them: technology and society.

Excitement around new communication technologies has led to a tendency for people to maintain a position of technological determinism undermining the role that society plays on the potential uses and successes of the technology in question. Expansive realization, as has already been defined, explains that new communication technologies do not produce new desires in individuals. They only offer opportunities for desires to be fulfilled and these opportunities depend on how their users use the devices toward fulfilling those desires. On their own, they do not make dreams come true. They are simply an avenue for which dreams and desires can come to pass. Therefore, they are not, on their own, “active” agents in the social world. They are more like ‘agents-in-waiting’ becoming active only with conscious human effort and being successful depending on the needs and desires of their users. It is the users of the Internet and cell phones that are powerful even if this power was only realized with the aid of new communication technologies. It seems, however, that the users fail to get this acknowledgment on the same level as technology.

Facebook Is What You Make It¹¹

The rapid globalization of Facebook is a testament to the extent of its reign as a social network all over the world. The enormity of its global reach, despite its relatively short existence¹², has led some to claim that we are living in the era of the “networked individual”; the individual being the primary unit of connectivity (Wellman and Haythornthwaite 2002:34 cited in Lee 2011:3). For all the pros and cons attributed to the social network by its millions of users and non-users affected by the network, perhaps indirectly, Facebook continues to be a social phenomenon that some people (myself included) still cannot seem to figure out. People love it. People hate it and others put up with because it has become necessary in some aspects of everyday life. How this popular social network works towards the benefit or detriment of certain individuals and populations, as you would imagine, differs all over the world. Material culture anthropologist Daniel Miller’s (2011) *Tales from Facebook* is a captivating book that allows the reader to enjoy the findings of his ethnographic study on Trinidadians and their use of Facebook in Trinidad. In his anthropological approach to understanding Facebook, Miller tackles the social network not as an American creation that happens to be used in Trinidad but he looks at it as if it were specifically a Trinidadian construction asking how Facebook affects Trinidad as well as how Trinidadians simultaneously affect Facebook. Acknowledging the inaccurate assumption that ideas and uses of Facebook are universal, Miller looks to Trinidad to symbolize the inconsistent uses of Facebook outside of the Western or

¹¹ This chapter is a critical review of: Miller, Daniel. 2011. *Tales from Facebook* Polity Press ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-5209-2 (ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-5210-8 (pbk).

¹² Facebook was launched in 2004 by then Harvard University student Mark Zuckerberg (Ogle 2011)

European context. The book is an investigation into the consequences of social networking for ordinary Trinidadians, exploring how their lives have been changed by Facebook.

It might first be necessary, as an amateur reviewer, to confess that I am not on Facebook. I do not have a Facebook account and have no desire to join the social network. I am not on Facebook for four reasons¹³ and I cannot personally relate to the phenomenon in the same way that my ownership of a cell allows me to relate to the euphoria and rapid integration of cell phones in everyday lives all over the world, for example. However, my inexperience with Facebook and my desire to attempt to understand what all the fuss is about without actually having an account of my own were encouraging factors for reading the book. As enlightening as Miller's book was, I suppose, though, that I will, at some point, have to join the social network if I am to truly experience Facebook. Begging the reader (and the author's) pardon, I would, however, like to review the book based on what I have read and heard about the social network, in spite of my inexperience.

Allow me to start off with a funny story. One evening I was sitting in my room in the home of my host family¹⁴ reading Miller's book. My 10-year old¹⁵ host sister came into my room, sat on my bed, and read aloud the title of the book. She laughed and asked "Facebook... what is that, a book with a face on it?" I thought she was joking as I honestly did not think it was possible that someone

¹³**A.** My social life runs smoothly enough without a Facebook account. **B.** For as little time as I like to spend on the Internet, I would rather communicate directly through email, sign off after sending, and not be lured into hours of who knows what as is what seems to happen to people who are on Facebook. **C.** I value my privacy and consider Facebook to be too public **D.** I am not a fan of taking pictures. Though I have been told that you do not need to display pictures to be on Facebook it seems pointless for me to be part of something that revolves around picture sharing (something that Miller shows is a very significant use of Facebook in a Trinidadian context).

¹⁴ I read Miller's book while conducting my own ethnographic fieldwork (on an unrelated topic) where I lived with a host family in my field site.

¹⁵ She'll be 11-years old in October.

could *not* know what Facebook is. As I have already mentioned, I do not have a Facebook account and admit that I do not understand all there is to Facebook beyond a general concept of staying in touch with current friends and family members and reviving (or attempting to revive) relationships with friends and family members from the past as well as spreading news quickly. As appealing as the general concept is, I have never felt the almost compulsive need to join the social network the way others seem to. Nevertheless, I at least know what Facebook is. That my host sister is only 10-years old should have made it easier for me to digest her ignorance to the social network giant but somehow it did not. She is familiar with the use of 'MXit'¹⁶ on cell phones and I have been told that 'MXit' is similar to Facebook. She does not have an email address and spends little time on the Internet but it had not occurred to me that she was too young to have heard of or mentally registered the popular use of something called Facebook. How many other people do not know what Facebook is, I wonder? It would be interesting to find out. This was an eye opening experience for me, not to mention cute that she thought Facebook was literally a book with a face on it.

Perhaps my host sister's question was influenced by the cover of Miller's book. While it is not simply a book with a face on it, the cover consists of a picture of a woman who looks agitated staring at her laptop screen. My first impression of the book and what it was going to reveal about Facebook was that everything about the social network is bad. The woman is lying in her bed, seemingly undressed apart from her blanket, with her arms raised as if she is about to pull her hair. Though her eyebrows look freshly plucked which could suggest that she has been out of the house recently and she looks as if she is wearing eyeliner and lipstick (perhaps simply just for the cover photo shoot but there could be significance in her make-up being more noticeable than natural), her hair is a mess. Undoubtedly

¹⁶ MXit (pronounced: mix it) is a free online mobile instant messenger and social network that works on mobile phones. One can "enjoy multiplayer games, meet new people in our chat rooms, and buy and sell goods all from their mobile phone" (<http://mxit.com>).

she has not yet showered and her teeth are probably not brushed. Looking at the woman was enough to make me feel stressed. I got the feeling that she had been on Facebook for hours, perhaps even a day or two and desperately wanted to get off the computer but could not for reasons that I would find out after reading the book (although I have already heard of the addictive nature of Facebook). More than a look of surprise or shock by the news she may have just received on Facebook, I think she looks like she is going crazy and if she spends just one more second on Facebook she might explode.

I admit that the cover of the book set the stage for me to confirm my conclusion (though maybe not for the same reasons) that I am better off without a Facebook account. By better off I mean that the social network is something that I would not want to be bothered with; that the annoyances and disadvantages of Facebook must far outweigh the good. And being the compulsive person that I am, it would be too easy for me to find myself in a similar experience to the afflicted woman on the cover. However, not sparing the dissonances and ambivalences and the very real detriments that have been associated with joining and being active users of the social network, Miller has shown that the use of Facebook, in a Trinidadian context, can be quite beneficial particularly to the shy, unpopular, elderly, disabled or homebound individual. The book is divided into two sections. The first section reveals the accounts of some twelve Trinidadians and their individual uses and experiences with Facebook. The latter introduces fifteen potential theses on what Facebook is becoming as opposed to its initial purpose, whatever that was. Additionally, he exposes his own attempt to theorize the social network giant within – though not necessarily limited to – a Trinidadian context. He does acknowledge, however, that even the variety of experiences we read about Facebook in the twelve portraits suggests that Facebook, even among members of the same population, will “represent multiple worlds, each with their own Facebook, each with their own consequences” (p. 203) and therefore there is no such thing as ‘Facebook’. Facebook as a social network,

when it is used as such, is and will always be an ever-changing form of social media contingent upon the individual user (2011).

Having conducted extensive fieldwork in Trinidad and being quite fond of the Trinidadian culture, I thought, at first, that Miller's confidence in Trinidadians, particularly in regards to Facebook, was a bit over the top as it seemed slightly arrogant for him to claim, "I anticipate that Trinidadian usage will not just be distinctive but also in some ways ahead of the game. That while innovation in Facebook as infrastructure will come from the company, ideas about what one can do with Facebook may arise first in a place such as Trinidad" (p. *xiv*). Having never read a book or (long) article dedicated to the use of Facebook within a specific population I felt that his claim was biased. Being a fellow anthropologist, however, I could understand his intimate relationship to his field-site and the people whom he has had the pleasure of working with for so long. Later in the book he suggests that comparative studies of the use of Facebook within particular populations such as what is presented in *Tales from Facebook* will "determine the extent to which Trinidad Facebook corresponds to any global [use of] Facebook (p. 158). As Miller seeks to contend the concept of Facebook as global, arguing that Facebook is global only because it is used everywhere (p. 190), I acknowledge that the use of Facebook in Trinidad, for example, could significantly differ from what American inventor Mark Zuckerberg intended or expected it to be used for and this could introduce the realities of the extent of Facebook's abilities in different cultures and contexts. If Facebook, as a social network, becomes subject to processes of localization that make their regional appropriation distinctive, then the social network giant can become the source of new cultural identities (p. 161). Therefore, new ideas about the additional and perhaps endless possibilities of what can be done with/through Facebook could indeed arise within a Trinidadian context, for example, and I regret my initial feeling of Miller's overconfidence.

Suggesting first and foremost that there is no such thing as Facebook because of the multiple uses within in a variety of cultural contexts, different from the site's intended purposes by Mark

Zuckerburg, the primary focus of the book is on what Facebook is becoming, in Trinidad, rather than what it previously was or was intended to be in general. Using the twelve portraits to present a variety of experiences of Facebook for the ordinary Trinidadian, the reader is confronted with both the pleasures and life-saving opportunities of joining the social network as well as some of the downfalls. Addressing the negative aspects on the one hand, we read of Facebook as the thief of time as it engages individuals in hours of virtual time (p. 78-88) limiting their existence and participation in the real or physical world (though some would suggest that virtuality is the new reality; that the virtual world is more 'real' than the real world, see chapter 4 p. 40-53). Facebook has also become both the most obvious yet most unsuspecting culprit in the contamination of personalities (see for example Josanne's story; chapter 9, p. 99-111) and healthy social relationships through its destruction of privacy. Facebook is a social network and is therefore public. Facebook users willingly join the site to learn about others or to communicate with their 'friends' in particular as well as a wider population in general. It seems that people join the social network for the social conveniences that it may offer but do not really consider its public features as privacy might be less of a requirement when on the site, yet the book revealed a general complaint about the lack of or destruction of privacy (2011). In the Trinidadian context, it seems, Facebook users are constantly at risk of social jeopardy. Where frequent picture sharing, status updates and general postings/comments come across as both optional yet obligatory, all users stand to have their own reputations or personal relationships ruined (or alternatively improved) at one time or another.

We read, for example, of a man whose marriage ended because of his wife's excessive tracking of him through Facebook (p. 3-16). While Facebook was an essential part of this man's job, he admittedly used Facebook to engage in 'extra-curricular' cyber relationships. He did not openly cheat on his wife but was, at times, flirtatious or did not protest females flirting with him through Facebook. Daily, his wife checked his Facebook page which usually resulted in

accusations. Both his professional and less formal interactions were conducted through Facebook and despite knowing that his wife and potentially others could view these interactions, he did not change the offending behavior. It is written that “Facebook was separating him from the mother of his child” (p. 4). It seems, however, that Facebook is not the culprit that it is made out to be in this situation. While his wife used Facebook as a means of trailing his interactions (and he knew this), one might suggest that ultimately this man, and his decision to continue to have questionable contact with females (via Facebook or otherwise), is more at fault. If we think of Facebook as an entity, we should not mar its personality based on this and similar situations. Miller argues that Facebook is not a social networking site; people are a social network (p. 121). So while Facebook is listed as a primary weapon in the assault of privacy (which has the potential to destroy relationships), it is actually a more or less innocent weapon that is harmful only in the hands of the wrong people.

On the other hand we see Facebook as a positive social network that creates and maintains a multitude of communities¹⁷ for most types of individuals. Facebook has become an extension of the physical self when physical and/or social limitations inhibit one’s ability to express themselves. We learn of one man’s ability to maintain social mobility despite being homebound; his claim being that “[Facebook] had potential to ameliorate loss and give new life where there had been little hope.” He further stated that Facebook “offered him mobility and articulation” (p. 32). We read of another young man who, through his extensive use of and success in online gaming on Facebook which gained him much attention and later boosted his confidence to chat about school and other non-game topics with others, has become quite popular despite his otherwise shy demeanor in public (p. 53-65). Yet another young woman’s use of Facebook changes according to her social desire. The social network site has become her primary outlet for social expression,

¹⁷ Miller acknowledges “community” as a problematic term (p. 184).

giving her a greater sense of privacy (being available to certain individuals only when she wants to be) while at the same time giving her the opportunity to be more public (p. 65-78). (I am still not sure how the site can offer both a greater sense of privacy in addition to allowing one to be more public at the same time. It seems as if Facebook users are always at risk of being seen by unintended users.)

The above features as well as the extensive use of Facebook to display and share pictures of their multiple selves, or at least images that reflect their selves, were highly regarded as primary uses and benefits (as regarded by the individuals portraits) of Facebook. Additionally we read of a woman, who like other Trinidadians, refers to Facebook almost as a truth serum; an opportunity for you to see and learn about the 'real' person as opposed to their (assumed) 'fake' offline selves. Facebook, this woman suggested, prevents one from making a false assumption about another based on appearance. She suggests that on Facebook it is impossible to lie about most facets of your life particularly if you have a lot of friends because they would know that you were lying. Pictures, even more than profiles and status updates supposedly depict the true nature of an individual allowing you to get to know them personally (and indeed it seems that Facebook would be far less successful if uploading pictures on the site were not a feature) (p. 40-53). Reading this portrait, I could easily understand why she would consider Facebook to be a truth serum and I might be inclined to agree with her if these portraits were my only knowledge in the world of Facebook. With everything that I have heard in personal conversation or read about Facebook, I actually considered depictions presented on Facebook to be less than a completely accurate and true representation of an individual. In regards to truth and lies, I would think that Facebook would be an easy and potentially safe place to lie about oneself. The woman suspected that a friend would speak out against another friend's lie. That may be true in select circumstances but I would not imagine that speaking out against another person's lie would be of extreme importance. One also has to consider that the correction might not

be seen by all or any of the people who are meant to see the correction or that people might not care either way.

Furthermore, pictures depict only a moment in time. I would assume that most of the moments captured and shared on Facebook are happy or funny, only partially representing an individual as they neglect the sad, angry or less exciting moments in their life. Speaking as a non-Facebook user, I base these statements on my own opinion. However, looking over the shoulders of my own friends and family's pictures on Facebook, I do not consider my assumption to be too far from the truth. Perhaps in a Trinidadian context, pictures of all moments regardless of mood or situation are posted. Perhaps this is a necessary, unstated requirement for posting pictures just as it is necessary to display images of one's sexy self and one's funny self or displaying pictures of one's self in an embarrassing moment or unattractive photo (p. 40-53).

Pictures aside, I would also not consider Facebook to be a truthful or accurate representation of an individual because of 'friending'. I have known people to accept dozens and even hundreds of friend requests on Facebook only to admit to communicating with a select few. So while a high friend count may depict someone as very popular, the reality can be quite different. I have learned that it is well known that the likely hood of one communicating with all of their 'friends' on a frequent or consistent basis (or at all) is low. While this suggests that a high friend count does not lead to an assumed high popularity status it still seems that the number of friends could potentially contaminate one's perception of another person's true self.

I also consider the fact that Facebook give's one the prerogative to portray as much of themselves as they want and whatever they portray is not always necessarily true regardless of how many friends they do or do not have. Facebook, as a space where lies can be passed off as truth, creates anonymity. People are and can potentially be whoever they want to be. With anonymity comes the confidence that may be lacking otherwise. Facebook, as a social network, serves as an outlet for social interaction even in situations where face-to-

face interaction would cause fear or anxiety (Hanson 2007) or be impossible. I think of a recent story that made the news regarding a man known in some parts of South Africa as the ‘Facebook rapist’ for example. Accused of victimizing four women and murdering one, the ‘Facebook rapist’ met his victims on Facebook and lured them claiming to be a businessman of a fake company and offered them modeling and television work (Dolley 2011). For the perpetrator, Facebook was a means to create a fake self for the purpose of luring victims. Though I cannot know if this man had friends who should have been able to, as the woman in Miller’s book suggested, point out that he was lying about who he was, they did not and his victims remained unaware of his true identity or intentions. (I acknowledge that the perpetrator probably used a fake name unknown to his close friends therefore making it less likely that they would ‘find’ him and perhaps call attention to his lies). Whether or not it was known that he was a rapist or a conman offline, it was apparently not known online either. (It is not common enough knowledge to know (if and) how a rapist or conman would present themselves ‘accurately’ on a social network.) We do know, however, that he was able to con these women via Facebook where face-to-face contact with the women may have proven less successful perhaps because his lies may have been transparent and his true intentions may have been more noticeable. From the above example, it would seem that Facebook is not synonymous with truth and in some situations the notions of truth and Facebook could be oxymoronic.

In light of his extensive research on the uses of Facebook within Trinidad, Miller’s intent is to find out if it is possible to construct a theory on Facebook. In his quest, he addresses Munn’s (1986) theory on fame in *The Fame of Gawa* which states that the activity of exchange (reciprocity/mutual obligation) “represents an expansion of inter-subjective space time: the scale of the world within which people can live and gain fame (p. 208). Similar to Munn’s theory, Miller also refers to Mauss’ *The Gift* (1990). Mauss (p. 10-12) reveals that though gifts are given under a voluntary pretense, the reality is that there is an obligation to give which in turn leads to an obligation

to receive. To refuse to give is like refusing to accept which is ultimately seen as a refusal of friendship. Using the theory behind *The Gift* as a stepping ladder for his interpretation of Facebook, Miller suggests that the use of Facebook in a Trinidadian context is premised on and produces relationships “bounded by sequential obligation.” Facebook associates will comment on and send cyber gifts to each other with the expectation that those comments and gifts will (and should) be returned almost immediately or within a day or two of receipt (Miller 2011:210).

In a Trinidadian context, Facebook is the expansion of communication between individuals (p. 208). We learn that, in general, the most important attribute of Facebook is the “degree to which it seems to help us return to the kind of involvement in social networks that we have lost”. The use of Facebook has become significant for its “perceived and actual ability to reconstruct relationships, especially within families and with absent friends, that had been gradually fading away due to the attrition of other aspects of modern life, such as increasing mobility” (p. 217). In Trinidad, we learn that this significant attribute of Facebook is slightly manipulated where many of the relationships that are created or rebuilt and maintained via Facebook tend to be more forced than natural. The kind of involvement in social networks that may have been lost in Trinidad, then, has become obligatory. Friends, lovers and family members in Trinidad seemingly join the site willingly but are quickly pulled into a world of push and pull where, commenting and tagging friends is more mandatory and less optional. For all the good and bad qualities attributed to Facebook through Miller’s study, we learn that for Trinidadians, communication via Facebook regardless of the extent of physical offline friendship is crucial to keeping friends or saving face whether one actually enjoys being part of the social network or not. Communication becomes stronger but can lack genuine intent and privacy, as a luxury, is tampered with by the use of Facebook yet the social network giant continues to maintain its hold over many faithful users. To be part of Facebook is to be part of a

wider team that requires participation from all of its users to make things work, whatever that means to each individual.

As one of Miller's aims is to challenge the concept of Facebook as global, he presents its uses in a Trinidadian context hoping to reveal the uniqueness to which Trinidadians use the social network as opposed to the 'expected' Western or European uses of Facebook. He acknowledges, however, that only with comparative studies of the use of Facebook within particular populations can we determine the extent to which Trinidadian use, for example, corresponds to any global use of Facebook (p.158). For as little knowledge and experience that I have with Facebook, I cannot say that anything that I read in the book came as a particular surprise to me. As an American prepared to broaden my knowledge of Facebook by its uses in Trinidad, none of the uses or experiences portrayed in the twelve portraits seemed particularly unique or unparalleled to the uses and experiences that I have learned from my own informal questioning around the social network among my family and friends. Save for the perception of Facebook as an exceptional opportunity to learn of a person's true identity, all the other uses are in tune with what I have already gathered about Facebook. It is, therefore, hard to share Miller's conclusion that Facebook is not in fact global based on this book alone and my other knowledge, albeit limited, around the uses and experiences of Facebook by some of its users. However, I do not suggest that one should generalize the uses of Facebook globally. I agree that comparative studies would be of greater support to this claim as I would imagine that uses around the world vary significantly. And while the uses of Facebook represented in the book may not be particularly unique within my own frame of reference, Miller's claim that there is no such thing as Facebook, I think, is validated through the twelve portraits which testify to the multiple uses of Facebook even among a group of people from the same place.

Reading Miller's book did two things for me: While the portraits have not particularly encouraged or discouraged my choice not to join Facebook, the book has given me a greater insight to the

pleasures and tensions around the use of the social network. Additionally, it has given me an unholy craving for a Doubles!!

ICTs, Strategy and Coping in the Western Cape

Fiona Ross's (2009) ethnography *Raw Life, New Hope: Decency, housing and everyday life in a post-apartheid community* was inspired by her knowledge gained from extensive research in an informal settlement located in the Western Cape, South Africa. In 1991, during the time of her research, 'The Bush' (later re-named 'The Park') was an illegal settlement under constant threat of razing from the apartheid state. 'The Park' was home to both Colored and African residents (though the population was predominantly Colored) seeking to establish a home for themselves and their families at a time where deficiencies in housing provisions for non-Whites led to the rapid birth of 'backyard shacks' and informal settlements (p. 1-2). Ross's study was one that explored how individuals and families who find themselves in extreme poverty and marginalization "make meaning, make do and get by, and sometimes succeed in goals set by a mainstream society that for the most part does little to support them and has little sense of either the constraints they face or the ingenious ways in which they attempt to cover them" (p. 7). As I am currently conducting my own research in Cape Town, South Africa on new information and communication technologies and the reconfiguration of marginality towards my Doctorate, I found it helpful to familiarize myself with Ross's work as an authority in my area of study.

My research on ICTs and the reconfiguration of marginality is a study of migration and belonging focusing on Langa Township located in Cape Town. Established in 1927, Langa is the oldest Township in Cape Town (Wilson & Mafeje 1963) and was allocated as one of the main reserves for the housing of migrant laborers (Wilson 1972). Langa Township is a settlement that owes its initial existence to internal migration but has come to include both internal and external migrants from within South Africa and around the

African continent resulting in increased issues around citizenship and belonging. In a socially marginalized population such as the residents of Langa Township, I am interested in new ICTs, particularly the cell phone, and the various innovations employed by such a population from these technologies to meet a variety of needs. Langa Township is a constitution of mobility. It is the epitome of a settlement contingent upon mobility and migration. Assuming that patterns of mobility and migration today are intertwined with the social appropriation of ICTs, my study seeks to address the extent and ways that ICTs: mitigate distance for mobile communities; lead to new socio-economic relations; redefine socio-political relations; relate to development of the marginal (mobile) populations in South Africa and how. While Fiona Ross's research does not refer directly to ICTs, her work, like mine, deals with a population of people who are socially, politically and economically marginalized in Cape Town, South Africa. Most influential in *Raw Life, New Hope* were the stories around sense-scapes (Ch. 3 pp. 54-75), social networking as a strategy for getting by (Ch. 5 particularly pp. 112-127) and communication and speech communities (Ch. 6 pp. 138-167). This paper, however, is not particularly a review of Ross's book. Providing extensive information on my own research background of migration, belonging and communication in Cape Town, I refer to her book for comparative interests and focus on certain aspects to make sense of and balance emerging ideas of my own.

Ross begins her ethnography with a story about Nongwase, an African woman, mother and resident of 'The Park', and her blue post box. The post box, for Ross, came to symbolize Nongwase's "aspirations to an ordinary urban life in Cape Town, an expectation that an African woman and her family would remain in one site long enough to receive mail and would do so legally" (2009:1). As a resident of 'The Park', Nongwase was much like most of the other residents seeking for a place to call home for themselves and their families. Langa Township, like the former informal settlement 'The Park' is 'home' to thousands of Africans who have invested their time and money into calling Langa their home. Inhabited mostly by local

South Africans, Langa residents also include African immigrants from a range of African countries who all like Nongwase, hope to temporarily, occasionally or permanently live an ordinary and comfortable urban life in Cape Town. Unfortunately, however, Langa Township, understood as a marginal settlement in a post-colonial South African context, is, for many residents, only a (far from inevitable) means to an end in the hopes of an 'ordinary' life. In South Africa, the logic of exclusion has facilitated a tendency to perceive and relate to migrants essentially in terms of "outsiders" and to confine them to a real or imagined "elsewhere" (Nyamnjoh 2006). Langa Township is just one of several "elsewhere's" in Cape Town.

Marginal spaces like Langa and other Townships in Cape Town have a tendency to be considered socially and economically disconnected from the rest of Cape Town (Cook 1986 cited in Skuse & Cousins 2007: 981). On the contrary, Skuse & Cousins (2007:991) have argued that Townships are very much connected to greater Cape Town, as they were meant to be through their labor in colonial and apartheid times (Wilson 1972; Mayer 1971). The political economy of labor, livelihoods and migration is such that Township "residents do form an integral part of the economy and social life of greater Cape Town, albeit on very unequal terms and strictly delimited in a number of ways through construction of space, urban geography language, class, and race" (Skuse & Cousins 2007:991). With the general identification of im/migrants living in Cape Town as unwanted strangers whose homes are elsewhere (Nyamnjoh 2006), Langa and its inhabitants as a whole are homogenously treated as "outsiders". Michel de Certeau (1998 cited in Ross 2009:59) states that one's position in space reflects their understanding of it. For residents of Langa Township, understanding their position as socially and economically disconnected from the rest of Cape Town can reinforce their own understanding of themselves as "outsiders" forcibly contented to occupy spaces otherwise known as "elsewhere".

Mobility, Migration, Globalization and Belonging in South Africa

South Africa has an extensive history of internal and external migration within the country (Mayer 1971; Wilson 1972; Mamdani 1996; Akokpari 2000; Neocosmos 2006). Mobility, as an umbrella term that includes all types of movement including migration, is for many Africans, a means of survival (de Bruijn *et al* 2001:1). South Africa has been a place of refuge for many African immigrants fleeing political incompetence and economic mismanagement in their home countries (Neocosmos 2006; Dodson 2010). Internal migration within the country is also often driven by similar political and economic factors. Employment opportunities have been a primary incentive for migration into South Africa as migrant labor has, since the 1800s, been a practice of the country. Farmers and mining companies in the Western Cape solved the recurrent problems of labor shortage by recruiting male workers from a variety of places including – but not limited to – the Ciskei, Transkei, Mozambique and South West Africa (Wilson 1972).

Hired on a contract bases, the system of migrant labor was one in which men would oscillate between their rural homes and their places of work during their contracted period. Such was the demand for migrant labor that native reserves were allocated to (temporarily) house the thousands of men recruited for work, particularly those who could not or chose not to go home regularly (Wilson 1972: 1-8). In 1923, “Section 10”, one of the law regulations regarding migrant labor provided under the Urban Areas Act, identified (male) migrants who had legal permission to live in cities and large towns. Permission to (temporarily) occupy housing provided for laborers was visible through passes that were to be carried at all times. Frequent pass raids were necessary to ensure that only those with legal permission resided in the allocated areas. Qualifications for legal permission required ten consecutive eleven month periods in a particular city; the eleven month periods revolving around work contracts (Mamdani 1996: 228-29; Mayer 1971; Wilson 1972).

The history of employment opportunities in addition to the attraction of the country since the end of Apartheid continues to make South Africa a popular place for migration for both internal and external migrants (Akokpari 2000; Crush & McDonald 2001; Peberdy 2009). The interconnection between globalization and migration in Africa is growing. While globalization ensures the free movement of labor, capital goods, technology and opportunities for development (Akokpari 2000: 1-2), it has exacerbated the migration trend resulting in intensified insecurities around notions of citizenship, belonging and entitlements for both locals and foreigners living in South Africa (Nyamnjoh 2006). The influx of (black) im/migrants into South Africa has generated increased feelings of xenophobia – a form of exclusion keeping those who are considered “different” at a distance- (Banton 1996:8; Neocosmos 2006; Sharp 2008; Sichone 2008) and xenophobic hostility towards ‘foreigners’. In May 2008 a series of xenophobic attacks against foreign Africans living in South Africa took place leaving dozens of people dead and thousands more homeless (Dodson 2010). These expressions of xenophobia displayed the harsh anti-immigrant feelings embedded in some of the South African population – despite the fact the migrants were previously encouraged to come to South Africa for work. While such movement from migrants was previously encouraged, currently, this same movement is policed by ideas about properness around the appropriate distribution of persons in space (Ross 2009:60) where it is no longer ‘acceptable’, particularly by the disadvantaged black population, for African immigrants to inhabit the same spaces.

Not all immigrants experience xenophobic discrimination and social exclusion to the same extent. South African nationals, citizens or locals choose carefully between those who qualify for such treatment and those who do not. These qualifications are built on hierarchies of humanity informed by stereotypes and preconceptions around race, nationality, culture, class and gender (Nyamnjoh 2006). Indigeneity, a historically problematic notion in Africa because of its political basis and the ever changing interpretations of the indigenous person (Geschiere 2009; Mamdani 2009; Pelican 2009), has also

contributed to distinguishing those who 'belong' and are therefore (more) entitled to rights from those considered worthy of xenophobic discrimination. Most recipients of xenophobic hostility and social exclusion are believed to come from countries assumed to be "economically and culturally backward in relation to South Africa" (Nyamnjoh 2006:38-9).

Stolcke (1995:3-7) has argued that cultural fundamentalism justifies the exclusion of foreigners or strangers. Xenophobic hostility towards immigrants, foreigners, or 'strangers from without', in Europe, she says, was predicated on cultural exclusiveness following the belief that "relations between different cultures are by "nature" hostile and mutually destructive because it is in human nature to be ethnocentric..." resulting in the necessary separation of cultures. The problem with cultural fundamentalism however, as Wright (1998:8-9) has argued, is that the former concept of culture was seen as a bounded and unchanging set of ideas that were shared by a whole population of homogenous individuals. However, cultural identities are fluid and consistently negotiated: "constructed situationally in particular places and times". For South Africans to exclude or hold xenophobic reservations towards foreigners who are believed to be, among other things, culturally different, then, is problematic first of all because of the preconceived notions of bounded culture and the inflexibility of cultural identities and because of the assumption that foreigners from the same region all share the same (or similar) culture – which is above all else 'backwards'. Xenophobia being intimately related to notions of citizenship and belonging has relegated those who do 'not belong' to the denial of rights and entitlements usually expressed through prejudice, stereotypes and sometimes violence. In South Africa, where around half the population is said to be impoverished and facing their own social and economic crises, xenophobic discrimination has, by some, been deemed justifiable (Neocosmos 2006).

Black African immigrants, in particular, seeking shelter and economic opportunities in South Africa have historically been disliked by South Africans, the disadvantaged black population in

particular, and are often classified as unwanted. Black South African nationals often regard them as competition for jobs particularly because they can be employed for lower wages. Foreigners were also thought to cause competition for housing and other resources for which the “natives” alone felt entitled (Crush & McDonald 2001; Neocosmos 2006; Sharp 2008). Additionally, foreign African males were accused of “stealing the local women”. Even though all African immigrants did not experience xenophobic hostility or to the same extent, the fact that all black foreigners were considered threatening to land, jobs, resources and women reveals the frozen image of black foreigners in South Africa. This negative image of black foreigners is problematic in that it regards all black African foreigners, regardless of where they come from, as one making them a homogenous people regardless of myriad differences among them. Social boundaries have been constructed to keep black African immigrants living in South Africa separate (confined to their “elsewhere”), and almost incapable of belonging. Still, the fact that nationals in South Africa can assert their legal citizenship but still be seen by themselves, or others, to be ‘less authentic’ based on a variety of factors, continues to fuel the growing preoccupation with citizenship and belonging (Nyamnjoh 2006: 1-14; Geschiere 2009:17; Dodson 2010: 4-6)). Black South African citizens are made to believe that safeguarding their citizenship and belonging depends on the reinforcement of the distinction between them and the subjected races and ethnicities. Subsequently, subjects are made to blame (black) African im/migrants for their failures (Nyamnjoh 2006, 2010). Despite facing social exclusion and occasional violence im/migrants have found ways to survive in the country nonetheless.

Communication and Strategizing

Cell phones, the latest technology to be domesticated on the African continent (Nyamnjoh 2005), have been credited with producing new opportunities for the re-negotiation of social relations and spaces in creative and innovative ways (de Bruijn *et al* 2009). The

desire for im/migrants to re-negotiate social relations both within their host communities and with their loved ones at home has made cell phones a desirable necessity, however ambivalent. South Africa's history of colonialism and apartheid has produced racially and ethnically segregated spatiality's distinguishing between places of 'work' and 'home' (Ross 2009:60). My quest to learn more about ICTs in this context has shown me that cell phones, for example, have caused a blurring among these distinctions as their ability to compress time and space offer more ways for people to occupy the same spaces regardless of legally or socially enforced rules to maintain their separation. Relations are often embedded in a long history of migration and mobility; formed in a space where relations are maintained over vast distances and where societies or social networks extend to the rural and the urban, and beyond national boundaries. The rural and urban, the national and international are connected by a series of people and relationships, both real and virtual, especially since the advent of new communication technologies (de Bruijn *et al* 2010:270-71).

Indigenous forms of communication for many African societies include verbal, aural, drama, songs, poetry, 'talking' drums and horns. Traditional means of communication were generally transmitted orally to communicate important messages and to broadcast community information. 'Talking' drums, in some societies, were used, among other things, to transmit urgent messages to large audiences; to summon people for public meetings; to announce war or to alert societies to the death of an important person. (Mushengyezi 2003: 108-11; Awa 2005: 219-20). Modern mass media was first introduced in Africa in the 1800's with the publication of a small variety of newspapers in some parts of the continent (Awa 2005: 219; Nyamnjoh 2005: 40). Since then, the process of globalization has introduced additional modern forms of communication.

While indigenous forms of communication have remained essential modes of communication across Africa as a whole, there has been the need to develop and keep abreast of new technology in

order to communicate effectively (Castells 2000: 7; Mushengyezi 2003: 115). And while both indigenous and modern forms of communication have their limitations, the event of information increasingly being contained in computers and on the Internet in addition to television transmission, radio broadcasting and other audio-visual equipment has made traditional oral communication hard to sustain (Mushengyezi 2003: 115) on its own. Cell phones have been known to compliment oral communication particularly for spreading information (Nyamnjoh 2005). The situation is one where Africans increasingly appropriate and blend new technologies with the old, the modern with the tradition and the mass with the interpersonal to serve their communication needs.

Communication in Africa has gone through a multitude of changes since the introduction of mobile technology (de Bruijn *et al* 2009: 11). Mobile phone use in Africa is growing faster than anywhere else in the world. Currently, Africa has a larger market of mobile phone users than North America. Rarely has there been a faster adoption of mobile phones and with greater innovation (Essoungou 2011) as has been the case in Africa. In Africa, where the consumption and integration of mobile phones have significantly accelerated since the 1990's (de Bruijn *et al* 2009), the term *keitai*, a Japanese term defining something you carry with you that represents a personal device supporting constant, light weight and mundane communication in everyday life (Ito *et al* 2005: 1, 20), on the one hand, could be extended to descriptions of the mobile phone in an African context where they are often used for casual conversation or just to say hi. On the other hand telecommunications have become a key indicator of the realization of basic rights which include: "rights to communication, to social development and in turn, to various aspects of social, economic and political inclusion and equality" (Crush *et al* 1991; Crush & James 1995 cited in Skuse & Cousins 2009:185-86).

Given their rapid integration across the continent, mobile phones appear to be welcomed communication devices. It could be argued, however, that the widespread use of mobile phones is a forced

“choice” as there is a lack of (commonly used) alternatives. Evidence has shown that some low-income users use mobile phones that they can barely afford (Tlabela 2007:8; Horst & Miller 2006). However, many people willingly use cell phones because of their most assumed benefits including: constancy of communication, mobility, individual control and privacy (Horst & Miller 2006: 79), the compression of distance, agency stimulation and the upgrading of prestige and social status (de Bruijn *et al* 2009).

Assumed benefits aside, “the phone has become part of the pattern of communication and is important for establishing new relationships and keeping old ones going” (de Bruijn *et al* 2010: 272-73, 78). Relationships, we know, are important for securing social networks. De Bruijn *et al* (2009) show that the social appropriation of cell phones have led to new forms of relating both in the local economy and in social space, particularly for migrants wanting to live comfortably in their host regions or countries. Calls within kin-social and non-kin social categories, besides maintaining connections with loved ones, are crucial for maintaining a communication presence within complex social and economic networks that may be geographically ‘stretched’ while also bearing on the success or failure of individuals or families to secure income flows resulting from, among others, state social welfare payments and remittances (Skuse & Cousins 2009:198).

Despite the well-known fact that cell phones have become essential to creating and maintaining social networks, I wonder if the integration of this mobile device has stunted or decreased the ability to maintain worthwhile social networks and furthermore the ability to strategize. Social networks, much like the way they are used by low-income Jamaicans (Horst & Miller 2006, see also Chapter 8 in this book) are used to aid poverty alleviation. In ‘The Park’ (Ross 2009) people turn to social networks to help find jobs. Finding work, for example, was contingent upon establishing and maintaining the “right kind” of social networks including family, friends and acquaintances. This increased the likelihood that one would be alerted to job opportunities. In ‘The Park’, social networks were generally

maintained through the sharing of goods, alcohol and gossip (p. 112). Being flexible in one's communication pattern could almost be regarded as a talent. With cell phones making communication less intimate, less time consuming, and less thought provoking, one may be 'good' at communicating and hanging on to relationships while still not communicating in a way to secure a genuine social network with people who know them personally and are indeed willing to help them in any way that they can in times of need.

Speech communities are essential. Speech keeps relationships growing, facilitating acceptance and enabling social relations (p. 139). "Straight-talk", we learn, are face-to-face encounters that expose one's sense of need, hurt or anger and other vulnerabilities to others (p. 145). This is necessary for clear and adequate communication of one's need and should not be reduced to "face-saving conventions" (p. 145) like Facebook and texting, both of which are currently the more popular ways of 'talking'. When we think of "elliptical-talk", a talk that allows one to say what needs to be said without explicitly saying it leaving them unaccountable for the contents (p. 157), we can refer more to ICTs and their ability to cushion conversations that one is more likely to be uncomfortable to have during a face-to-face encounter. In Jamaica, young couples described how much easier it was to break up with their partners via texting than in person, for example (Horst & Miller 2006). Where securing relationships and maintaining social networks previously relied on 'straight-talk' to use the terms provided by Ross (2009), currently, this reliance has been taken over by 'elliptical-talk' though still attempting to attain the same social goals as before. This I believe to be one of the major flaws of increased cell phone use although I know that sometimes the 'elliptical-talk' communicated through cell phones, many times, acts as a precursor to the 'straight-talk' that will eventually occur between people.

I also wonder how such quick and informal 'elliptical-talk' reinforced by new communication technologies has stunted the ability to strategize and think on our own in times of need particularly for marginalized populations who have had to be especially

resourceful when combatting life's hardships. In *Raw Life, New Hope* (2009) we learn that the residents of 'The Park' struggle to combat poverty and achieve forms of decency that have cultural and social value (p. 123). Some residents took on a variety of jobs, some less decent than others, to make money. Clive, a male resident, resorted to prostitution to make ends meet. For Clive this "was just one way among many of making use of the full range of tools at his disposal including sexual use of his body" (p. 108). Prostitution was a means to an end. It was what he did to secure some kind of financial future. Being paid, Ross tells us, has an "intrinsic relation on personhood (p. 110). Money had the potential to not only purchase goods, but to pacify social relationships and connect people to social networks that could prove useful in the future particularly when the struggle with the "heaviness of everyday life" was too much to bare alone (p. 123)

"Making a plan" (p. 123), learning to cope with joblessness and finding strategies to deal with life's heaviness are strategies that I feel have been compromised by the quick and compulsive nature of the cell phone where no one wants to think for themselves. The term *expansive realization* (Miller and Slater 2000; Horst and Miller 2006) suggests that ICTs have provided opportunities to perform historically established desires and indeed 'making a plan' to survive when the odds are almost always against you is one such desire. Utilizing mobile communication technologies in itself is not a problem as they do (sometimes) make 'making a plan' easier. However, the extent to which they are relied upon seems to have diminished our capacity to even attempt to handle the situation ourselves (even when 'making a plan' ourselves is quite within our reach). Instead, we have resorted to calling people at all times of the day and in the middle of the night, a time where they should be sleeping and looking for support/advice from them to help solve our problems. Is this a fixable problem? Is it even a problem at all? Has the acceptability and convenience/usefulness of cell phones been taken over by compulsive, addictive and irrational behavior of most/some/many/all cell phone users? Have we lost the ability to 'make a plan'? Gone are the days, it seems, where one, would go out

and find a way to make money, no matter how indecent, to solve their own problems (for low income Jamaicans it is a common experience to 'beg' someone for money via texting Horst & Miller 2006); where one would sit down and figure things out on their own. We look to cell phones for quick communication within our social networks so much that we do not think for ourselves. Our first response to trouble is to call or text someone for advice or help. Yes, this has proven beneficial during many a hardship or potential disaster but we have grown too dependent on this option and have forgotten how people coped with things before communication became such a luxury.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) accelerate mobility in their compression of time and space. They accelerate social mobility as well, even if to a much lesser degree. Migration to urban centers from impoverished and underdeveloped rural areas from within and around South Africa constitutes an essential survival strategy (a plan well made) for many poor households for whom accelerated mobility imposes an urgent need to manage 'distance' and 'time' in the interest of their relationships. This they do principally through the use of fixed and mobile telecommunications services. The mobile phone in particular, has allowed people in rural areas to manage aspects of distance in extended kin-networks (Skuse & Cousins 2009:187) while being mobile. In South African Townships and informal settlements, as well as elsewhere in Africa, both poor and urban dwellers are using cell phones to stay in touch with rural relatives and maintain healthy communications with the places and people distanced from them by mobility (Nyamnjoh 2005; de Bruijn et al 2009, 2010). These ideas offer a useful entry point into my investigation of ICT facilitated mobility, communication and belonging in Langa.

My study is a study of migration and belonging in South Africa, with an ethnographic focus on Langa. Migration entails breaking links with familiar people and places. It also entails seeking to create new links in the host community while exploring old and new ways of staying in touch with their home village or home country. Though

my study takes a special interest in cell phones as potential facilitators in the maintenance and preservation of relationships with home in addition to the creation and maintenance of new relationships in Langa, it is not my intention to glorify cell phones as the great, all-purpose, all-positive communication devices that they are often credited as being. I do not ignore the controversies around this communication technology. Indeed, scholars have shown that they can severely limit and eliminate face-to-face interactions and I have begun to question this limitation in the ability to strategize. Cell phones often serve as a means for escaping social responsibilities (Lamoureaux 2011:40). They have also caused, or reproduced, social hierarchies, competition and inequalities between individuals. And while they have been credited with rendering “certain situations safer and more practical” mobile phones have been blamed for the facilitation of crime by encouraging theft and offering increased opportunities for criminals (Horst & Miller 2006; de Bruijn *et al* 2009: 24, 81). Furthermore, as I hoped to show through my own experience with my cell phone (see Chapter 2), techno-social relationships, as with most relationships, are not always harmonious. Seeking to understand migration and the making of flexible identities for migrants in addition to the ever changing notions of autochthony and belonging, I refer to communication technologies –in a historical perspective –as they must have played a significant role in the lives of migrants in the Western Cape and their quests to simultaneously occupy and belong to several worlds.

Baby Steps into Langa Township: Running in Langa

Running, my valued pastime

I love running. I do not consider myself a runner because I think that term classifies die hard athletes whose lives revolve around that sport. I am just someone who runs for exercise and I happen to love it. I was on the track and field team in elementary school but never pursued a career in running. After elementary school I did not run at all. Now, I run several days a week but I do not belong to a team. Running is something that I do on my own; I run when I want to be alone. Though I have a couple of friends who also run for exercise, I am not in the habit of running with them. I run alone accompanied only by my thoughts or the music on my iPod. I do not carry my cell phone when I am running as I would not take any calls during that time anyway. I like the freedom that this activity offers me. While running, I am not accountable to anyone. It is my time and I value the solitude and the invisible barriers that I have, until recently, learned to maintain around myself when I run.

Though after elementary school I did not run for years, currently, I cannot really imagine my life without running. I began running almost four years ago. Initially, I started running to keep fit but I also run as an opportunity to think, plan, regret and sometimes cry (internally). Running carries me away from the busy world and ushers me into a place of quiet reflection. I can dwell on any current matters on hand or remove myself as far away from them as possible by thinking of other things all the while running any frustrations or anxieties out of my system, at least for the time being. Other times, I do not think at all. I immerse myself in the music playing on my iPod. Running gives me a sense of control. I run when I want and for however long I want to. When I am running I own the pavement (or

grass). When I am running nothing and no one matters. Of course, running on the main road means that I have to be courteous to pedestrians and mindful of the cars when I am crossing the street but they do not control me. They may disrupt me for a brief moment but the ball is still in my court. I am in control.

Music is a major part of my running experience. I listen to a variety of songs while I run. Songs with nice tempos that are compatible to my running speed are good for me. I also like slow songs that I can warm up or slow down to. Even though I do not sing aloud while I run, I love to sing along with the artists silently. Sometimes I even pretend that I *am* the artist giving a performance. I think up the scenario in my head complete with dancers, background singers and fans. Running brings out the star performer in me even if only in my head. I used to think that I could not run without music. Once I was preparing to go for a run when I saw that my iPod was not charged forcing me to run solo. It was difficult at first because part of my ritual is pacing my speed and breathing to the beat of the first song. I sang a song in my head to get me going. After I had steadied my pace I stopped singing. I noticed that my thoughts were louder and clearer. At first I did not like this because unless there is something significantly important on my mind, I like how the music helps to drown out my thoughts so that I can think without being overwhelmed. The volume of the music usually depends on how much and what kind of thinking I want to do. After a while it was ok. I can think clearly when I am running. Sometimes I have complete dialogues in my head when thinking of an approaching conversation that I am to have or I can think up paragraphs or transitional sentences if I am working on an essay. Sometimes I just think about life: where I am and what I plan to do in the future. Running helps me to work these things out mentally while physically exercising. I feel good when I run. I feel alive. I feel attractive. Not necessarily desirable but attractive in that I am keeping myself healthy.

Running is a private activity for me. This was not always the case because in the very beginning, running was a mechanical routine that I endured to help stay fit. It was just something to do to stay active.

When I first started running I would ask people to run with me for extra motivation and companionship. I was always turned down and got used to running alone. Now I prefer running alone and shy away from intimate running invitations with just a handful of people. If I am not running alone I prefer to run with hundreds of people in an organized running event where I can blend in and disappear. Apart from my weekly running regimens I have, on occasion, entered into organized running events which are also fun and usually elevate my desire to push myself further distances during my personal runs. I love the reward of running with hundreds of people as much as I love being cheered on by fellow bystanders who know nothing about me but cheer for me as if we are best friends. I feed off of their energy. Usually, I do not know any of the other runners in an event but we are all running toward the same goal and that is enough for us go from being complete strangers to friends just for a time.

My first organized event

My first organized running event was a 6km fun run. At that time, I had been running for barely a year and my normal route was a mere 4km. Though 6km was only two more than what I was used to, it was a big deal. I was so excited. I was driven to the event by my then flat mate who is indeed a runner. We were both excited. This was not her first event but the mood was perfect. Pulling up to the running site we saw people stretching and psyching up to run. Further ahead we could see the runners who had chosen a longer distance and had therefore started earlier. I was (positively) jealous of them wishing that I was capable of running a half-marathon or even just a 10km run. We got out of the car and began stretching ourselves and soon it was time for us to start. Myself and hundreds of other runners scurried to be as close to the starting point as possible. There were too many people and I was nowhere near the front but that did not knock my spirits. I laughed with the other runners as we exchanged apologies for bumping into each other in our excitement and futile attempts to get close(r) to the starting point. Under

different circumstances, that amount of pushing could have created a lot of aggression but everyone was happy and excited. It was fun.

The announcer welcomed us, encouraging us to have fun and enjoy the race. A few seconds later a shot went off. We were free to run. I wanted to run so badly but I could not. There were too many people and no space to run. Instead we walked until spaces opened up allowing us to finally start running. It was not long before I could run but I could feel myself growing impatient despite my excitement. After a few seconds of walking and pacing I was off. It was the most amazing feeling to be part of an event like that one. Though I prefer exercising alone, running alongside so many people was a huge and welcomed contrast to my normal habit of running alone with my music. Because I did not know anyone apart from my flat mate, who managed to get significantly closer to the starting point than I did creating a great distance between us, I was still running alone. There were hundreds of other runners there but I had no obligation towards them. I ran in my space, they in theirs. We ran with each other but we were not together. Very early into the run I saw a blind man with a wooden leg. He wore thick black sunglasses and ran with special crutches. His other leg was very muscular and I guessed that he was a seasoned runner. With him was a shorter woman who I could hear coaching him saying things like “Ok we’re coming up to a hard left. Be careful this part is rocky”. I thought ‘wow, if he can do this, why can’t I’. He inspired me and I marveled at the woman’s patience. I was happy to be running with them.

I ran with people of all ages, young and old. It was one thing for a younger person to pass me but seeing people older than I was outrunning me was motivation enough for me to pick up speed or at least to keep going when I felt like I wanted to stop. Though I realized that I was competitive in this sense, I do not run with the intent to win. I do not need to come in first, second or 109th place. My goal is simply to finish and finish well (finishing within the allotted time frame). I did not know how far I had run. I only knew that I had passed the 3km mark and I was already winded. I kept going, feeding off the other runners’ energy. I kept going and going

until we came to a subtle but noticeable hill. I had never run uphill during my normal route so this was a first. Surprise, surprise I made it up the hill without stopping. My legs burned just enough to let me know that I had not worked those muscles before but I made it. I kept going. At some point, while going up the hill, I lost control of my breathing and I could not breathe in a steady rhythm afterwards. My legs taunted me ever so gently but enough to make me want to walk and I did. I hated myself for walking. The running route was riddled with aggressive runners, people running for fun, people who had intended to walk the entire 6km and runners who began running and stopped to walk (for different amounts of time). I did not want to be in the latter group. I started off running and wanted to run the entire race without stopping but my body was not as stubborn as my brain. Earlier in the run there was a man running with his two sons (I assumed they were his children). The children could not have been more than four and seven years old respectively. One of them had started slowing down and the father yelled (in a very encouraging way) “You can do this. You can do this. C’mon don’t stop. We need you. We’re doing this together”. It was such a moving scene. I was behind them at the time but moved passed them as he was encouraging his boy. From what I saw the boy kept running. I wished that I had someone with me to encourage me that way.

I did not walk for long. I just needed time to steady my breathing. I was running again soon enough. At the beginning of the race, I ran with my head up watching the other runners to the front and side of me. At that point, however, I ran with my head down looking at my feet as if taking my eyes off them would cause me to stop. I felt my posture stooping and knew that I was tired. I had definitely run more than 4km and was out doing my normal distance. I kept going. A cheering bystander yelled “C’mon, only two meters to go”. As an American, I am not too familiar with the meter as a measuring unit and, though I knew they were short, I had no idea how far a meter was. All I knew was that we had not one but *two* of them to go, no matter how short they were, and my heart sank. I felt like I had been running for so long. I wanted to stop but I did not. I kept going. I

began to hear cheering but kept my head down and continued to watch my feet. Before I knew it I was running on grass. Until this time we had been running on ground and I concluded that being on grass meant that we were close to the end. That deduction and the increasing cheers made me lift my head and I saw the finishing point made very visible with a red banner. There was a huge clock that read thirty-one minutes and I cannot recall how many seconds. The finishing point was full of runners who had finished and those who were just about to finish. There were people waiting to congratulate friends and strangers. There were red flags everywhere and further ahead were rows of tables topped with rows of white paper cups. Somewhere inside me was an energy boost that came to surface and I sprinted (or felt like I was sprinting) to the finish point. I was so happy. I looked at the time to see that I had finished in 32 minutes (I did not take note of the seconds). I had done it!

I happily walked out of the way to let other finishing runners enter the finishing point. There were several volunteers handing out medals. I put mine on right away. I then walked to the tables topped with white cups and learned that they were filled with Coca-Cola. I picked up a cup and drank it all in one gulp. I heard my name being called and saw that it was my flat mate. We were both sweating but we hugged each other anyway. That was a great day. Until then, running was something that I did on my own. It was becoming a precious pastime done almost in secret. My presence in this event was not widely known, I was just a number among hundreds of numbers but people were cheering for all of us. The medal that I received upon completion felt like a personal acknowledgement of my desire to run and an affirmation that such an activity could be rewarding both privately and publicly. I wore my medal proudly knowing that on the way home people would notice it around my neck. I felt like a champion despite the short distance of the run. On that day, I wanted other people to know that I was a champion too. This was not an everyday thing. In the next day or two, I would be running my normal route on my own. There would be no medal to congratulate me when I finished but that was ok. I enjoy the private,

quiet, invisible reception of my finish when running alone but I truly enjoyed the loud reception of my public finish further complimented by the medal. I knew then that I *loved* running.

Getting the hang of it

I did not always love it because I was not always good at it. As stated earlier, I started running a couple of years ago because I was out of shape and wanted to add some kind of exercise into my life. I knew it would be pointless to join a gym because it would be too easy for me to talk myself out of going regularly and my money would be wasted. Running was something that I could do outside on the main road however often or infrequently I felt like it for free. I remember buying a pair of running sneakers and running gear. I wanted to go running immediately and planned to go the next day. The next afternoon I put on my new clothes, which were too big for me as I had not tried them on in the store. It was ok though. I was comfortable anyway. Dressed and outside my front door, I turned on my iPod and began running. Forgetting that I had not run in years and was out of shape, I made the mistake of taking off at my full speed. Surprisingly enough, I kept it up for about a minute before my lungs started burning and I had to stop to catch my breath. I walked for the remainder of the four minute song that I was listening to and started running again when I caught my breath. Picking up speed again I ran into the same problem: my lungs burned and I could not breathe. Panting, I stopped and walked for the remainder of the next song. This went on for perhaps a half an hour before I decided that it was enough for one day and I walked home. I was proud of myself even though I would not call my first run an actual run. It was more of an extended walk littered with running bouts. Still, it was something. I felt motivated and was looking forward to running the next day until I woke up the next morning and my body ached all over. If I had not known that I was out of shape before, I definitely knew I was then. I was so sore. I tried to stretch but was too stiff to even do that.

After that day I did not run for about a week. The next time I ran I planned to start slow and build up to the speed that I started out with on my first run but that was a lot easier said than done. I did not know how difficult it could be to jog; it was as if my brain did not register anything between walking casually (or fast) and running at full speed. Trying to jog was also challenging because it felt like I was not doing significant exercise and I wanted to get in shape. I knew though, that I could not run at full speed for longer than a minute. I was also having trouble breathing. I would listen to the rhythm of the song that was playing on my iPod and try to match my breathing to the rhythm. The problem with this was that as the songs changed sometimes the rhythms would change too abruptly and my breathing would easily be thrown off (now I run with songs similar in rhythm so as not to affect my breathing). I went running several times but it was not working. No, running was not for me. I could not run fast for long, I could not jog and I could not breathe properly. I gave it up. Luckily I had only purchased one running outfit and one pair of running sneakers. I did not lose too much.

I left running alone for a while until one day I was stressed with school. I had two essays due for two different classes. Plagued with writers block I needed to do something to get my mind off the stress so that I could attempt to think and perhaps write later. I did not want to read or watch a movie. I wanted to do something different and I considered running because I thought it might release some of the stress. I put on the same running outfit that I had bought (it was still too big and I was grateful that I had not put on weight) and found my iPod. For some reason the ear buds would not stay in my ear as they had when I went running before and I was tempted not to go after all. My solution was to place the ear buds into my ear and then tie a headscarf (fortunately it matched my running top perfectly) over my head making sure to capture my ears so that the ear buds stayed in. It worked and I set out to run. I found it easier to jog this time probably because I was tired anyway. I ran straight. I thought about everything but my essays but it was nice to go through my thoughts in this way. I felt free. With the music playing into my ears,

the noise of the world around me was reduced to a comfortable low and I was left with myself, my music, my thoughts and the pavement. My breathing was not perfect but it was much better than it had been. I kept feeling the need to stop and catch my breath but I was able to keep going for much longer. Focusing on my breathing took a lot of mental energy but I was still able to think about other things. I do not know how long I was running but I decided that I should turn around and head back home. When I got home I felt great. I was sweating and my heart was pumping and I felt on top of the world. After my shower I felt relaxed but could still feel my adrenaline pumping. I did not attempt to write either of my essays later that afternoon but I felt like a new person and I was proud of myself for having completed what I thought was my first decent run even though I had, until then, given up on running. Currently, I run three to four days a week for an hour – sometimes closer to an hour and a half. I am not a compulsive runner but I hate to miss running for more than a few days.

Running as a private activity

Living in Rondebosch allows me to run on the main road towards Town or Wynberg in complete solitude despite the fact there are always people busying about their daily lives. I usually see other people running too, both male and female, mostly students (I presume) but quite a few older people as well. There is never any real acknowledgement of one another although I normally greet other runners when I pass them. It is nice to see them. They are encouraging to me at times when I feel like stopping. I see them and keep going. Also, I feel a sort of bond with them. It is somewhat weird but let me try to explain it this way: I have dread locks. I started them in September of 2006. Starting dread locks is a decision that should not be made lightly. It is not a decision that one should rush into. While they may appear to be an easy hairstyle alternative, the start and continual maintenance of locks is time consuming and takes a lot of patience. When I see other people with locks in their

hair I sometimes feel a connection with them. It took seven months for my dreads to lock and during that time, I hated my hair and what it looked like during the transition stages. I have known people who started to lock their hair but took them out before they completely locked for a variety of reasons, mainly growing impatient with the time it takes to lock and the various stages that the hair goes through when locking. I look at them and remember my own struggle with whether or not to continue with the locking process or take them out and do something else. Without being overdramatic this was a hard time in my life. I felt insecure during the locking stages and hated what I looked like. My head looked particularly big and I hated to show my hair. I spent most of the beginning months wearing headscarves to cover my embarrassment. I chose to lock my hair simply because I thought they looked nice on other women but I had not known that it would be so hard. Though I am satisfied with my hair now, if for some reason I had to start the process all over again, I would not do it. I was/am happy that they finally locked and was even happier as they grew because I could style them. I respect people who have locks because I know what they have been through. We have at least that much in common and for that I feel a slight bond with them even if we only pass each other on the street and I never see them again.

Seeing other people running causes that same feeling in me. Running was a choice that I made to keep fit and I entered into that choice lightly. Still, the ambition that it takes to get up and go running is one that I admire in them and myself and we have *that* much in common. The main road is an open space often crowded with people but I can still carry out this private activity without feeling that my privacy has been violated. I do not run the same days every week but I usually run at the same time on the days that I do run and have gotten used to seeing the same people. I smile or say hello to them and the vendors that I frequently pass. We do not have conversations. We greet each other but there is no expectation of a follow-up conversation. Sometimes it is as if they barely notice me, or they notice me but do not really care. I do not mind if they do not

care. I would just as well run on the main road if it were completely deserted (it sometimes is if I go early enough). The general greetings are just a formality. Our passing is probably nothing more than confirmation that things are on schedule. We are not rude to one another but no one is particularly looking forward to seeing me run and I am not looking forward to seeing them go wherever they are going. We speak in the name of courtesy. Running is not a stop and chat activity, at least not for me. That would break my concentration. The invisible borders that I put up around me work well on the main road and my running is my business.

One of the reasons why I value running so much is because helps secure my privacy. Like my cell phone, running has the potential to deliver me from social situations that I find awkward or would just rather avoid. I find that I can hide behind running the same way that I can hide behind my cell phone. Living so close to campus and on the main road makes seeing fellow students a common occurrence while going to or from campus, going grocery shopping and running, for example. I am not a very social person and usually try my best to avoid conversations with fellow students or other familiar persons that I see outside of planned meetings. I admit that the extent to which I go to is sometimes ridiculous. If I see someone that I know from a distance, I will change my route completely sometimes going off the main road and thus completely out of the way of my intended destination. Sometimes I act like I do not see the person in attempt to avoid socializing. When that does not work I have to muster up the courage to say hi and indulge them in conversation if they should want to talk. I do not avoid people out of dislike for them or because I am rude, I am just not very good at conversation and avoid it when I can. I get nervous when I meet someone that I had not planned on meeting. My pretense of confidence is usually betrayed by my sweating which always happens when I am nervous. Other times, though I do not feel it, my top lip twitches and this is only pointed out to me when I am nervous so I have concluded that this is another self-betraying trait.

When I am running, however, it is easy for me to acknowledge a friend or fellow student without having to stop and talk. I can run past them and smile or say hi. A brief encounter such as that is perfectly acceptable when I am running given that many people would not expect me to engage in a more in-depth greeting or conversation because I am exercising. Where bumping into someone and being so curt in my response to them could be categorized as rude in a variety of situations, instances when I am running proves to be an exception at least in my experiences of running on the main road (this is not the case when running in Langa Township as you will see below). Though I sometimes feel shy and embarrassed seeing people that I know when I run, I do not have to muster any courage to pass them because I have no intention of conversing with them and I do not expect them to try to converse with me. I can hide behind my cell phone because it is not perfect and does not guarantee availability all of the time. I can hide behind running because it, for me, eliminates any expectations for me to be courteous or social particularly when meeting people at random.

From private to public running

In Langa Township, however, it is impossible to run in 'private'. Everybody notices. Everybody watches and everybody cares. Only in comparison to Khayelitsha Township do I consider Langa to be exceptionally small. Otherwise I consider Langa to be deceptively big. It appeared small and compact during my first visits but now I know better. However, even though Langa is not as small a space as I thought it was initially it is still too small a space to run relatively unnoticed like I can on the main road. Furthermore, running is not a popular activity in Langa drawing even more attention to my doing it. While living in Langa I run either through and around the Township or in Langa stadium both of which are visible to many residents. Running through the Township makes my running visible to a wider part of the population than running in the stadium but the stadium is both a popular hangout place for (young) men and a place of sports

practice for boys and they are likely to be there whenever I go running. While I consider running to be a private activity, the places that I am able to run in Langa make it a very public activity. It is not public in the way that any organized running event would be. I consider those public only because people have been invited (and have paid) to run on a certain day, at a certain time where they can expect many viewers to watch and it may even be televised, yet it is possible to participate and no one may ever know. In Langa, however, it is public in that my running has become almost everyone's business inviting (sometimes unwanted) comments from many of the residents.

During my first week in Langa I was not sure if it would be appropriate to run because I had never seen anyone running through the Township. My host mother and brother warned me that it would be "very dangerous" because "rape in S[outh] A[frica] is like an epidemic" and "these guys in Langa, they like to take chances". Discouraged, I thought it best that I go to Rondebosch and run my normal route on the main road whenever I wanted to exercise but then I thought that was ridiculous. Depending on taxi's to get to and from Langa would mean that I would spend up to an hour getting to Rondebosch to run for an hour and a half only to spend another hour cramped and sweaty in a taxi to get back to Langa. I did consider carrying my toiletries and showering in my flat in Rondebosch before returning to Langa but the whole process just seemed time consuming. This would be inconvenient.

One morning I decided to experiment. In Rondebosch, I usually set out to run at 6:40am but I learned that this would be dangerous in Langa so I left my home at 8:30am. This was the first time that I realized that Langa was a lot bigger than I knew it to be. I ran on the main road and through corners and was met by many unknown dead ends. I saw spaza shops, churches, a community phone booth and other small eateries that I had not seen before. Langa is also full of dogs and on this occasion I was nearly attacked by three. I was terrified and saw my life flash before my eyes (ok, that's a slight exaggeration but I was really expecting the worse). When they started

chasing me, I immediately stopped running, covered my face with my arms and screamed as loud as I could. I could hear them barking and growling and kept expecting to feel their teeth in my legs at any moment. I stood there scared and frozen, only able to scream and then all at once their growling died down. I uncovered my face and saw that their attention had gone to something else. I looked up and saw people staring at me, some of whom may not have seen the moment when the dogs' gazes were fixed on me and must have wondered why I was in the middle of the road with my arms covering my face. I was too shaken up to be embarrassed. I was still scared and walked slowly away from the dogs and the few people who were watching me until I was far enough to start running again. I made sure to slow down whenever I saw another dog which was very frequent. Coming around another corner I saw a huge white sheep eating from the garbage. (There's something you don't see every day.) It was actually pretty cute but I was still really hyper from the dogs and I slowed down to pass it. I could see that the amount of times I had to stop so as not to arouse the dozens of dogs would interfere with my run and my research assistant recommended that I run in Langa stadium in the future for less interference which I now do.

Reactions to my running in Langa

I do not remember if people noticed me during my first run. I was too consumed with staying clear of the dogs. When I was about to embark on my second run in the Township, my host sister begged me to take her with me. Initially I wanted to say no. I am not used to running with partners and like always, I wanted to use that time to think. When I first started running, I used to beg people to run with me but I had grown out of that. It was strange for someone to, now, be asking me if they could come along. Hoping to discourage her, I explained that I run for at least an hour at a time and was not sure if she could run for that long. She assured me that she could. Thinking of the impending violence that my host mother and brother had suggested would come my way if I went running I was genuinely

concerned for her even though I had not had any problems during my first run. Still, if anyone tried to hurt her, I wondered if I would be brave or strong enough to help her. I told her that I was not sure if it was safe for her. She asked her grandmother if she could accompany me and her grandmother said yes. Out of options, I had no choice but to agree to let her run with me. I put on my running outfit and came to meet her. She was wearing an oversized shirt, leggings and flip-flops. I said, “You can’t run in those. You need sneakers”. She insisted that she did not indicating that she was not prepared for a serious run. I was even more tempted to tell her to stay home but I had already said yes. I asked if she had nothing else that she could run in and she put on ballet flats. Though they had rubber soles, I knew that she would be uncomfortable early in our ‘run’.

We certainly were a spectacle, my host sister and I, as we slowly began making our way through the Township. People were staring and smiling, yelling things out in isiXhosa¹⁸ and calling out my host sister’s name in surprise. Some people asked who I was. My host sister did not seem to mind or even notice all the attention. Some people laughed. I could not tell if it was a mocking laugh or not. We must have looked funny because at my host sister’s request we held hands. Picture a tall woman and a short girl holding hands and running, the woman in full out running gear and the girl in house clothes and ballet flats. I cannot say that I was embarrassed it was just interesting to see how people responded to us. I had never received such attention when running on the main road. Then again, I had never run with anyone on the main road and I certainly have never held anyone’s hand while running on the main road. Perhaps that was it I thought, perhaps us holding hands warranted such exaggerated reactions. Surely running in itself did not deserve this kind of reaction.

¹⁸ IsiXhosa is one of South Africa’s 11 official languages and is the predominant language spoken in Langa Township.

As I expected, my host sister tired very early and we started walking before I had even settled into my pace. She asked if we could go home. I told her that this was why I did not want her to run with me. I did not expect her to run for a long time and I knew this would happen. She did not want to walk home by herself so I had to go with her, cutting my run short and losing motivation to go back and continue with our now slow walk back. She seemed oblivious to my annoyance. This was supposed to be my thing, my own time, and my own space. Despite how precious this time was to me, I let her in and she did not handle it with care. I could not be angry with her because she does not know the value I place on running (alone) and she is not someone who I would expect to keep up with me. She is after all just a little girl. We walked home and she went into the back to tend to the chickens. Our run was so short and uneventful that I had not even broken into a sweat. I was not in a hurry to take a shower. I sat alone for a moment and thought about how I would dissuade her from joining me next time. We could do other things together. Running was definitely not one of them...

As I began to run more frequently, I noticed people staring at me whenever I ran but they did not stare long. It was not such a big deal to run in Langa after all, I thought. However, even now when I am walking to the taxi rank or to the spaza shop or to hang out, people will call to me and say “Hey I saw you running”, or “You’re the girl who was running” or “Was that you running in the stadium?” Occasionally someone will stop me while I am running to comment. Unlike running on the main road where there is no expectation for me to stop and converse, people in Langa stop me with questions. The invisible borders really are invisible and disregarded in Langa. There are several males that I usually see hanging out near my home in Langa. One of them spends a lot of time in the stadium either alone in his parked car or hanging out with other males. Whenever I see him, he makes running gestures and smiles at me. The other guys have taken to this kind of greeting. I am not sure if they have ever seen me running personally or if they are just copying their friend. Sometimes his running gestures are followed by “When are you

running again?” which I take as a rhetorical question and never answer. I just smile back. Other people automatically assume that I am part of a running team and ask me what team I am on. One older man told me to “Keep up the good work”. I saw him as I was leaving my home one day. I had not seen him before and did not know what “good work” I was supposed to keep up. He then made running gestures and I smiled in understanding. “What are you training for” he asked. “Nothing, I just run for exercise,” I said. Another time I was walking to my home from the taxi and a resident mentioned that I did not look familiar and asked if I lived in Langa. I said yes and started to explain how long I had been living there. He cut me off saying, “Yes, I have seen you before. I saw you running. Yah, me and my friends were trying to figure out who this girl was...”

My research assistant also told me that people have told him that they have seen me running. He says it is “rare to see a black girl running”. (I didn’t ask him if he meant in general or just in the Township. He told me there was a white American woman who stayed in Langa for three months who ran almost every day and after a while people got used to her). It is funny, sometimes I feel like a celebrity. In Rondebosch, people rarely stop me to comment that they see or saw me running on the main road. Public knowledge of my running in Langa has been useful in one sense as people often tell me that I have to be careful because “They will try to rob me”. When I ask who ‘they’ is, they say “The skollies”. It is nice that people seem genuinely concerned about the safety of a complete stranger although some of them may know me from the friends that I have made. My host brother even suggested that I take his number and run with my cell phone so that I could call him if I felt threatened but I feel that running with a cell phone would draw more attention and by the time I dialed his number and he came, if he was able to come, who knows what would have happened. I have never been in the habit of running with my cell phone.

I am aware of how dangerous running could be in Langa (and anywhere for the matter) but I have, thus far, felt safe and am at least comforted that others are worried on my behalf. Having lived in

Langa for only a few months, I would still consider myself an outsider. I have successfully penetrated my field site in that my presence, to-date, has been welcomed and my acceptance as a (temporary) resident in the Township was surprisingly smooth. However, I am by no means an insider, yet. My identity as a black American, student and researcher keeps my outsidership at bay most of the time yet offers me a status as someone worthy of careful treatment sometimes more than some of the other 'foreigners' that also live in the Township. My safety is valued as though I am an insider and I often wonder if Langa residents would be so protective of me if I was not an outsider. Would anyone be concerned if my friend and participant, a 30-year old female resident of Langa, started running? Perhaps there is a need only to protect (certain kinds of) outsiders. It is like when my family has company over for dinner (a rare occasion in my home). We make sure that their portions are perfect, that their drinking glass is squeaky clean; that their silverware is sparkling, that there is enough seasoning and condiments nearby and that they are overall comfortable. And we serve them. When it is just us, no one could care less. Everyone serves themselves and if there is a problem with the portions, taste, dirty glass, dirty silverware and lack of condiments, tough. You deal with it yourself. And unless one of us is making a specific meal for the first time, we generally do not ask each other how the meal was the way we do with our guests. Perhaps this genuine concern for my safety is a gesture towards my eventual 'belonging' in the Township. The need to protect me could imply that residents want me to enjoy my stay, ensuring my safety and comfort and are perhaps deliberately intending to create a desire in me to want to stay in the Township longer than I planned.

Uncomfortable with all the attention

Though I appreciate the warnings, I do not like receiving so much attention around something that was relatively unnoticed before. It is not that to be known as someone who runs is a bad thing but that it went beyond that and became a subject for conversations

and questions, comments and often broken promises made me uncomfortable. Though my running is public knowledge in Langa, I do not flaunt my running as if to say that I am better than residents who do not run. Still, people often make comments justifying their inability to 'gym' as if I am openly condemning everyone who does not run (or exercise or play sports). People will randomly tell me "I used to play soccer or cricket when I was younger" or "I used to 'gym' all the time but now I've got a baby and I don't have the time", or "...the problem is I come from work too late and then it will not be safe to run", for example. None of the comments are said in a hostile way but that they usually come at a time when I have not mentioned anything about my exercising nor have I asked them about their exercising habits is a wonder. I do not know why they feel the need to explain themselves to me. Their (lack of) exercise does not affect me and I do not like or respect them more or less either way. I usually respond by asking questions around their past sporting activities or how many children they have or how old the child is if that is the reason they give me. I do not want to encourage their thinking that they have to justify themselves to me.

I also hate the fact that my running in public seemingly gives residents the right to advise me. Once a resident and I were walking and talking. I had just gotten over a very bad cold but still had a lingering cough. He mentioned, "The problem is, you only run with one shirt". I said, "Excuse me". He said, "Yah, I saw you running the other day and you were wearing the green shirt. Even though it is hot you should wear a jacket or two shirts". I was slightly embarrassed, as I am whenever someone mentions that they saw me running. However, I was also annoyed with his comment. I am not a professional runner but I have been running long enough to know what to wear and when to wear it. Firstly, I was indeed wearing two shirts: an under shirt and my running shirt. Secondly, I happen to be a heavy sweater and wearing unnecessary layers during summer runs is uncomfortable, sometimes leaving me overheated and dizzy. I wear running jackets and long sleeved shirts when the weather permits it and this month did not require anything more than what I had on.

Another woman asked me why I do not put my hair up when I run. I usually run with my hair in a ponytail. She thought that a ponytail would be too uncomfortable and that I should not have any hair on my neck. I admit that sometimes my hair rubbing against my neck is uncomfortable in the heat but again, I have been running long enough to know what is comfortable for me. Perhaps when my hair gets longer I will tie it up higher but for now, I am ok.

I create my own schedule. Like I said, I am not a compulsive runner but I do tend to feel guilty if I do not run for a few days. This is more for disciplinary reasons. I fear that if I go too long without running, I may lose motivation altogether. Apart from the psychological comfort that running gives, my running started out of a need to get in shape and for that, I need to remain disciplined. I run when I feel like it and do not run the same three or four days every week. Sometimes if I do not run on a particular day some of the residents will ask why I did not run on such and such day. 'Why is it any of your business?' I think to myself. I did not sign a contract saying that I would be running on specific days, or that I would be running at all. Why is it that even though I am a new arrival to the Township, my habits have been so documented that when I do not run on a certain day, I seem to somehow upset the natural order of things? I sometimes get defensive. I missed the days when my running was my business and my business only. I feel that if you are not running with me then it is not your concern. The thing is, however, since my host sister asked to come running with me, dozens of people have invited themselves or asked me if they could run with me, none of whom have committed to joining me. I guess I should be flattered and grateful for this kind of attention. Just as a concern for my safety has been aroused by my running, a careful documentation of my running habits, the need to relate to me in terms of my exercising by offering their own experiences of exercising or lack thereof, the need to offer advice on more comfortable ways of running and offering their company could ultimately suggest that I am on my way to becoming recognized a member of the community. This careful attention to this and other

aspects of my life while in the Township could suggest that residents have begun to see past my American-ness and my status as a student researcher from the University of Cape Town (UCT). They have begun to see me as a familiar individual living among them whom they feel obliged to accommodate and comment on my lifestyle. The familiarity of my presence, I hope will continue to create opportunities for me to conduct fieldwork in a mutual environment where residents see me more as a curious member of the community and not an intrusive researcher.

Still, it has been a struggle for me to accept this kind of attention and more exasperating is the broken promises intertwined with attention. The women that I usually hang out with often promise that they will join me the *next* time I go running (the 'next time' or 'tomorrow' has still never happened). Sometimes I warm up by running around one end of the Township before heading off to complete my run in the stadium. It is a well enough known fact by many of my friends that I run in the stadium. The few times that I have been stopped for casual conversation while warming up around the Township usually end in my mentioning that I am on the way to the stadium. Whenever one of the women asks me where I will run, I feel like it is some kind of trick question. They know I run in the stadium. If you already know that I run in the stadium, why would you ask where I am running today or tomorrow? And even if I was not running in the stadium, the only other option would be around the Township. I feel like they use where I run as an excuse not to join me. Sometimes they use the excuse that they do not have running sneakers which is a valid excuse but then why offer in the first place unless they intend to eventually by running sneakers. How long will they insist that they will one day join me before they realize that I know that it will never happen? Why do they feel the need to offer their company in the first place? I am not asking for it. No one has ever joined me (I get offers from both men and women. Sometimes I entertain them and ask when but usually I just smile and say next time). I have given up on expecting them to run with me and deep down I am relieved because I actually do not want them to. Still, I

wonder why one would offer to come if they know they will not. What are their intentions? Are they deliberately lying to me or is there a sincerity of their intent to run with me? One woman told me “Xhosa girls do not like to run because they do not want to lose their figures”. If that is true for all Xhosa women, then their offers are formalities never meant to go beyond simply offering to join me. However, the record will show that they at least offered to join me. Am I then supposed to offer my company during one of their activities?

On the first Sunday in October (2011), I participated in the Gun Run. My friend from Langa said he would come to the marathon to cheer me on but he did not show up. He sent me an SMS saying that he did not have money to take a taxi. I did not really expect him to show up. As lonely as I was after I had gotten my medal and the excitement was dying down, I was still ok. I am used to being alone in this regard. As much as I enjoyed the cheering from the bystanders, it was not necessary that someone be waiting for me at the end. I might have felt awkward particularly because I was drenched in sweat. No, it was best that he could not make it. Nevertheless, I still saw this as another broken promise. His claim that he would come cheer me on was made in front of other people when we were hanging out. I was excited about this race and brought it up myself though not intending for any offers to be made. Was his invitation just a publicity stunt? Personal communication with my supervisor has brought my attention to the fact that these broken promises could simply be their way of expressing sociality and solidarity with me and indeed the promise to join me is much more important than them actually committing to it. Again, I should seize these expressions of sociality and solidarity as opportunities to enhance my existence as part of the community.

I do not ask anyone to run with me. I do not expect them to and I do not want them to. Many residents take *my* running and make it *their* business. Eventually the novelty of my running should die down. Sometimes, while running in the stadium several young boys will join me and run with me for as long as they can. They are cute and look

forward to my coming. This does not feel like an invasion of privacy because they are young and cute and I enjoy watching them push themselves and each other to keep up. It is also motivating for me. Perhaps other people will get up the courage or find the time to run (on their own or in groups) and running will become a popular activity in the Township. Maybe then, the residents will not care as much and maybe my privacy can be restored. So powerful was the contrast between running on main road and running in Langa that I often felt uncomfortable and overwhelmed. Adjusting to this new kind of sociality has not been easy at all and not just in regards to running but in other aspects of my life which I consider to be private. Getting used to all of this attention will continue to be a struggle although I expect that as my presence becomes more mundane, the novelty will wear off and perhaps the attention will not seem as aggressive and intrusive as it does now.

I realize, though, that as someone just entering the field this type of attention is not only beneficial but crucial to my acceptance among the residents which will ultimately affect the kind of research that I can conduct among them. And, though I am a private person, I am as curious about them (if not more so) as they are about me. I may not express my curiosity in as overtly a manner as most residents but I allow room for the possibility that my research and the questions that I find myself asking could also be felt as overwhelming and quite possibly uncomfortable for some residents. Though this is not my intention I am sure it is also not their intention to make me uncomfortable. We are currently in the process of trying to understand each other and (hopefully) on our way to building trust between ourselves for a comfortable living and working environment. This is a dance for which I am still trying to find my rhythm or in this case, a run in which I am still trying to pace my breathing.

My experiences of being a Doctoral candidate thus far have already confirmed my expectation that my entire PhD journey will be like one long marathon complete with upward and downward hills. At times I will have the pleasure of “running” with others who will encourage me when my dissertation seems too much to bear. Other

times I will endure the hardship on my own where quiet reflections and silent moments will usher me into a state of mental and physical restoration and the journey will continue. I am still very much in the beginning stages of field work and will begin writing my dissertation next year (2013). My goal is to run into enough sufficient data to produce a dissertation worthy of submission and acknowledgment as contributing new knowledge to the field and lifelong marathon of social research. As with running, my overall aim is to finish and finish well.

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"Whether you love it or hate it, cell phones have become a part of everyday life, essential to our mediations of life in all its bewildering complexity. Crystal Powell's account of the cell phone as 'second skin' is a grounded story of this deep relationship that we have all begun to have with this ubiquitous, personal technology. A fascinating, enlightening narrative."

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"Crystal Powell's intimate and personal accounts of the discovery of her PhD research topic – the cell phone –, in her own life and in recently published books, will certainly also attract readers less interested in academia.... Her well written essays reveal that academia could be as exciting as the introduction of the cell phone in our everyday lives."

**MIRJAM DE BRUIJN, AFRICAN STUDIES CENTRE,
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Cell phones and the Internet have been the recipients of in-depth research on their increased and rapid integration into everyday life and the innovative appropriations associated with them in many societies. The cell phone has attracted particular attention in its perceived abilities to both enhance and destruct social relationships. Our increased access to social media and to the cell phone has taken social networking to an unprecedented level. These communication technologies are revered by many as great, all-purpose, all-positive communication devices in spite of their flaws. They are overwhelmingly bestowed with agency and superiority. Too often, they are idolized with little regard to how they affect and are affected by their users on a personal level. The mutual shaping between technology and society is not adequately acknowledged. Technologies, in spite of the seemingly endless possibilities offered by their many functions, can quite literally be sterile and useless objects outside of conscious and tangible human effort. Cell phones and the Internet, though undoubtedly capable of providing myriad beneficial opportunities for their users, need at long last to be put in their place. This book is a contribution in that regard. Kindled by her own intimate history with her cell phone and a growing curiosity about ICTs in general, this book is a culmination of Crystal Powell's thoughts, reactions to and interpretations of some of the literature on these technologies. The book draws on and critically reviews contributions by some leading authors on the social shaping of ICTs and social media to offer a more nuanced and complex understanding of technology in relation to those who use and are used by it.

CRYSTAL POWELL is a doctoral student in the department of Social Anthropology at the University of Cape Town. She is exploring the role of new information and communication technologies in the making of flexible identities and ideas of belonging among different categories of migrants situated in Langa Township in Cape Town, South Africa. She currently holds a MA in Social Anthropology. She is from Brooklyn, New York.



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